

POLITICS AND THE PULPIT:
GUIDELINES FOR PASTORS ON HOW TO PREACH BEFORE ELECTIONS

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
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MAY 2012

To Tom, my husband, my greatest supporter in life...

Thank you for making this possible.

If there is a decay of conscience, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the public press lacks moral discernment, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the church is degenerate and worldly, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the world loses its interest in Christianity, the pulpit is responsible for it. If Satan rules in our halls of legislation, the pulpit is responsible for it. If our politics become so corrupt that the very foundations of our government are ready to fall away, the pulpit is responsible for it.

—Rev. Charles Finney

The Independent, New York, December 4, 1873

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ABSTRACT

This thesis-project addresses the question of whether pastors should touch politics in their preaching. The Bible gives clear guidance for all of life and expository preachers should address all issues that are there, even those that have been adopted by political parties.

After examining evidence in biblical and theological literature for Christians being involved in the political arena, a series of seminars for pastors will be presented that deal with the issue of preaching and politics.

It is the purpose of this project to encourage pastors to preach on all topics from the Bible, even the controversial ones, and not from their own prejudice. It is also hoped that pastors will encourage their congregations to exercise their vote and that they will be able to do so in a biblically informed way.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Politics and religion have been inextricably linked since the very birth of this nation of America. It began when Horace Walpole stood up in the British House of Commons and said of the extraordinary proceedings in the New World, “Cousin America has run off with a Presbyterian parson, and that is the end of it.”¹ He was referring to the Reverend Dr. John Witherspoon, president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University), and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Many other Presbyterian and Protestant pulpits thundered out the cry for independence and it was said the war was fought in the pulpits as much as the battlefields. These included preachers on the other side of the dispute, like the Anglican priest Jonathan Odell, who supported the British and often mocked Witherspoon and other clergy who preached the same views. The Reverend Wayne C. Sedlock, in an article entitled *The Black Regiment Led the Fight in Our War for Independence*, says:

The pulpits of that era were anything but neutral. And they certainly did not subscribe to that error of reasoning so dominant in the churches today which says that the only proper subject of concern for the pulpit pertains to individual salvation and one's personal preparation for heaven. That, with a few moral platitudes thrown in for good measure, accounts for most of the “spiritual” concern in the preaching of the church.²

¹ Paul Langford, “Walpole, Horatio, Fourth Earl of Orford (1717 -1797),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press 2004, online ed.) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/101028596/Horatio-Walpole> (accessed May 2010).

² Wayne C. Sedlak, *The Black Regiment Led the Fight in Our War for Independence* http://www/chuckbaldwinlive.com/read_blackregiment.html (accessed April 2012).

So began a nation where, in subsequent years, the pulpit continued to be used for political purposes with preachers sounding forth on both sides of any war or argument and all claiming to have God on their side. It was so during the Civil War, the Civil Rights Movement and other movements like the Moral Majority led by the late Rev. Jerry Falwell in the 1980s. This brings us to the present day. Do pulpits and politics mix in our twenty-first century? Should preachers influence voters? How should pastors influence their congregations? How can they encourage them to think biblically as they prepare to vote?

This thesis project will present the case for pulpits still to be places of influence prior to elections. The media, the internet and many other voices are heard loud and clear at election times by the people we pastor. Many of these places have powerful powers of persuasion, clever techniques and in some cases underhanded and misleading motives. Preachers are convinced of the power of their own medium and they are convinced that they must influence their people from God's Word on moral and social issues as well as spiritual. How much more urgent then is the need to apply the truths of Scripture to the world of politics and election of governments.

The first thing that will probably spring to the readers mind is the oft used phrase, "separation of church and state." This might make the whole thesis seem redundant. However, this phrase is nowhere to be found in the Constitution although uttered by Thomas Jefferson and meant to be a protection for the churches rather than a limitation. A more pertinent issue for churches, and this thesis, is the legislation prohibiting nonprofit organizations from either endorsing or opposing any candidate. This legislation was proposed by then Senator Lyndon Johnson in 1954 and passed without debate.

Therefore what exactly can pastors and churches do politically? Pastors may preach on moral and social issues which, depending on the pastor's views, may by implication throw support behind one candidate over another. Churches may host forums where all candidates may address issues. Churches are also permitted to distribute non partisan voter guides giving information on where each candidate stands on the issues. A pastor may honestly give their opinion if asked by a church member.

This writer noted that prior to the last presidential election in 2008 many of her congregation had no clue what the two candidates stood for or who they should vote for. This came to a climax as choir members the Sunday prior to the election gathered before worship sharing their obvious ignorance and coming to the conclusion that "you pastors should help us more instead of going on about Moses!" Apart from the obvious put down of what the pastor thought was a brilliant series on Moses they were right. A congregation needed guidance on an important issue and they weren't receiving it. Thus began the formation of this thesis project.

In chapter 2 the biblical and theological background for this research will be examined. The first question to be answered is whether Christians should be involved in politics at all. Some will quote Jesus' answer to Pilate, "my kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36 NIV) and say that Christians should only be concerned about the Kingdom of God. However, the same Lord said that His followers were to be "salt and light" in this world (Matthew 5:13 NIV) and that is not possible if we are not involved in it. Jesus also advocated that the occupying Roman force should receive its taxes in his "render unto Caesar" illustration using a Roman coin (Mark 12:17 KJV). So these opposing views will be examined.

It is also important to see politics in action in biblical literature. This will begin with God's prescriptions for His own people for life together as a nation in the Old Testament including the provision for the weak and helpless as laid down in the Law and demonstrated in the book of Ruth. The clear voices of the Minor Prophet as they cry for justice for the poor will be examined. In the New Testament epistles such as the book of James speak clearly about a Christian's responsibility to the poor and the oppressed.

Other biblical and theological research will include Paul's injunction to the Thessalonians that "if a man will not will not work he should not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10 NIV) and the Calvinist work ethic that came out of such verses forming the New World as the first settlers here lived by its principles. This tension between social justice which often leads to the socialist ideology and hard work and entrepreneurship which are usually the signs of a capitalist society seem to have polarized political thought in America. This chapter will seek to bring some biblical clarification.

In chapter 3 a cross section of the large amount of reading material available will be examined including many books, blogs, journals and sermons. Jim Wallis and his organization the Sojourners along with leaders in the emerging churches have departed from the traditional evangelical stance of always voting Republican because of one particular issue like abortion. Their books and writings will be researched along with established evangelical thinkers like Francis Schaeffer and his *A Christian Manifesto*, which is still a classic for thinking evangelicals who are concerned about moral issues. Also writers from African American backgrounds who unashamedly write and preach about political issues and see the preacher's role as vital. One such writer is Efrem Smith

who coined a wonderful phrase that “the church has to be nonprofit but dare not be nonprophet.”³

The recent publication of “The Manhattan Declaration”⁴ on November 20, 2009, which opposes current and future laws infringing upon the sanctity of human life, marriage, faith and liberty was signed by prominent evangelical leaders like Charles Colson, Ravi Zacharias, and Ron Sider but also by fourteen Roman Catholic bishops. The document was also signed by administrators, heads and faculty members of seminaries like J. I. Packer, Albert Mohler, Robert Sloan, Duane Litfin, and many more. This declaration shows an alarm among Christian leaders at the present government’s apparent assault on issues that are important not just for Christians but for the wellbeing of society in general.

Chapter 4 will include research carried out in several congregations of differing denominations in northeast Pennsylvania. Members of these churches will be invited to fill out a questionnaire which will ask what they would like to hear from the pulpits before elections. This will be followed by three teaching seminars for pastors on why pastors should preach relevant sermons before elections. The seminars will include presentations on why Christians should be involved in politics, the history of Christian involvement in politics, and issues which are moral and spiritual but also taken on board by political parties. This study will culminate in an encouragement to pastors to address hot button issues and teach their congregation’s what the scriptures have to say on all social, economic and moral matters.

³ Efrem Smith, *The Hip-Hop Church: Connecting with the Movement Shaping Our Culture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005).

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2008/summer/17.32.html?start=6> (accessed April 2012).

⁴ <http://www.manhattandeclaration.org/the-declaration/read.aspx> (accessed April 2012).

It is hoped that the pastors in the local community from different denominations will attend and there will be the opportunity for discussion after each seminar or questionnaires to fill out if they prefer anonymity.

As well as local issues of concern it would be important to look at some general topics such as whether Christians should be involved in politics at all by examining the statements of Jesus in the Gospels.

Also an investigation into socialism versus capitalism would be an obvious general discussion topic. Does the Bible teach one over the other or is it more a “both-and rather than either-or?” Does capitalism, when it is working well, bring about social justice naturally as a by-product? Will any political system bring about a Utopian society?

The fifth chapter will analyze the results of the feedback from the seminars. The goal is that from all that has been read and discussed helpful guidance will be available to pastors who see their role as preacher to include the political arena. It should be possible to teach congregations the importance of exercising their vote in a responsible way with prayer but also being well informed about what the Bible says and what a candidate believes. This can be done without overtly endorsing one particular candidate but trusting that Christians can make informed and biblical choices in critical times where many Christian beliefs and values seem to be under attack and opposed.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

What does the Bible say about God's people being involved in the political sphere? Did the prophets preach politics? Did the disciples? Did Paul and the other letter writers in the New Testament? Let's begin with the Old Testament?

Old Testament

Wayne Grudem in his book, *Politics According to the Bible*, asserts that government was appointed by God in the first place.¹ He goes back to Genesis 9:5-6 where, just after the flood, when Noah and his family came out of the ark, God says he will require payment for the crime of murder, and that he requires this to be done by other human beings. "Whoever sheds the blood of man; by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."

Grudem argues that God establishes the obligation to carry out the most severe punishment, the taking of human life. "Once this principle is established, then the imposition of lesser penalties for lesser crimes is also validated, since if a government has the right to carry out the most severe kind of punishment, then it certainly has the right to carry out lesser punishments for lesser crimes as well." He also says that anarchy is presented in the Old Testament as "a highly destructive evil." He cites Judges 18-25 to

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 77-78.

support this. In these chapters we have a list of sins that are distasteful and require restraint and punishment if the society is to be ordered and safe. Grudem says this is because there was no government, literally no king, and Judges 21:25 summarizes the whole ethos of the day, “in those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

If Grudem is right, some form of government was necessary to enforce sinful human beings to treat each other with respect and ultimately to uphold the law of God. The Old Testament, however, shows us that God’s laws were also given to protect the weak and to promote the health or wholeness of his people. The laws in Exodus and Leviticus concerned the health and personal welfare of individuals and the proper and safe interaction between people. The law is well known and summarized in the Ten Commandments where first, reverence for God is commanded, and then respect for one’s neighbor and his property, then the parameters within which sexual expression is to be made. In the New Testament we know that Jesus summarized the law even more succinctly as, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” He then pushed this further by explaining exactly who one’s neighbor is and does so in the parable of the Good Samaritan showing one’s neighbor to be anyone who is in need including even one’s enemy.

Let us go back to the Old Testament, where we see the “*shalom*” of the people being of concern to God. Jeremiah 29:7 says to “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” Roy Herron, a pastor, who has also been a lawyer and state senator, says this verse “captures the essence of biblical understanding of citizenship and government.” It

says that by working for the good of others, we also work for our own good. Herron suggests we are both “contributing to, and benefiting from, *shalom*.”²

The word *shalom* is usually translated as peace and that is true to some extent but it limits this rich and complex word which really refers to a peace that comes about through wholeness and rightness before God. *Shalom* describes the wholeness that God intends for creation through righteousness and justice. According to the *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, *shalom* “is the state of wholeness that can include health, prosperity, security or the spiritual completeness of covenant.”³ It is a wholesomeness determined and given by God. This is the salutary society God desired for his people. Just as he saw all that he had made and it was good in Genesis 1:31 before the Fall, so he desires a good and wholesome way for people to live. This is why some Christians work towards that good way of life through political involvement. How better can they influence how people interact and share the beautiful and abundant resources he has given us?

We can learn more about God’s desire and provision for his people, by examining three other Hebrew words in the Old Testament. We go to Jeremiah 22:3 but these sentiments are echoed by other minor prophets like Micah and Amos. “Listen to what the Lord says: ‘do what is just (*mishpat*) and right (*tsedaqah*); rescue from the defrauder the one who is robbed; do not wrong the stranger, the fatherless and the widow; commit no lawless act and do not shed the blood of the innocent.’ ” Jean-Marc Heimerdinger, lecturer in Hebrew and Judaism at the London School of Theology, in the college’s

² Roy Herron, *God and Politics* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2005), 16-18.

³ E. M. Good, “Peace in the OT,” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 3:706.

journal, *Insight*, says he believes “God’s candidate in any election will seek to promote and implement *mishpat* and *tsedaqah*.”⁴

By exploring more fully the meaning of these words we can get a better grasp of what God desires from and for his people. Heimerdinger helps us, “*Mishpat* means justice which includes fairness, equity, impartiality.” So, the powerful and wealthy must not make decisions at the expense of the poor and defenseless. “The widow, the orphan, the immigrant must be listened to with all the fairness they would be listened to by a judge.”⁵ But justice alone is not enough. It needs to be complemented by *tsedaqah* meaning a generous attitude towards other human beings. It is an attitude that causes people “to take care of others, to give them their due, to put their needs before one’s own.”⁶ Heimerdinger summarizes it this way,

In the Hebrew Bible *tsedaqah* is exemplified in three institutions that reflect the agricultural background of ancient Israel. In the year of release, debts were cancelled. In the year of Jubilee, the ancestral fields were returned to their original owners, and the slaves were able to go free in the seventh year of service. *Tsedqah* mitigates the rigour of bare justice and impartiality, as is shown in the example of the creditor who must return a pledged coat to the debtor who needs it to keep warm by night (Deut.24:13) Behind *tsedaqah* lies the idea that what we possess we do not own, but we hold in trust for God, and one of the conditions of that trust is that we share some of what we have with people in need.

There is another Hebrew word that needs to be considered in this context: *hessed*. Micah 6:7 says, “what the Lord requires of us is this: to do what is just, to love *hessed*.” *Hessed* is faithfulness, loyalty that results in acts of kindness. It is “love-as-deed exercised towards one’s neighbor. *Hessed* humanizes society,” says Heimerdinger, “but

⁴ J.-M. Heimerdinger, *Who Does God Vote For? Perspectives from the Hebrew Bible* (London: London School of Theology, Insight Spring, 2010), 16-17.

⁵ Heimerdinger, *Who Does God Vote For?*, 16-17.

⁶ Heimerdinger, *Who Does God Vote For?*, 16-17.

by its very nature it cannot be legislated or imposed by governments or rulers.”⁷ This is one of the current arguments about politics and religion. On the one hand there is the notion that you cannot legislate morality and on the other the belief that legislation, our laws were implemented for that very reason. As can be seen by the fuller explanation of the meaning of these Hebrew words, the individual with a heart toward God will exhibit these values and attitudes but society has to be regulated for the fallen nature of man that was inherited from Adam. Grudem uses the example of drunk driving.⁸ A person will not drive under the influence of alcohol if he has a sense of responsibility towards other people, if he cares about others more than himself. But there must be laws against drunk driving for those who don’t have that sense of moral responsibility.

The Role of Prophets

In the Old Testament the prophets played the role of keeping leaders and kings faithful to God and using their power correctly. The prophet Nathan confronted David with his abuse of power that brought him to a point of conviction before God for the sins of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah (2 Samuel 11,12; Psalm 51). Elijah pronounced judgment on Ahab for deceiving Naboth out of his ancestral land and killing him in the process (1 Kings 21). The term “speaking the truth to power” has been used in many contexts but originates in 1955 in a Quaker pamphlet concerning the Cold War written by Milton Mayer. Old Testament scholar Walter Bruggeman believes “we may readily characterize preaching as speaking truth to power.” He cites several

⁷ Heimerdinger, *Who Does God Vote For?*, 18.

⁸ Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible*, 49.

examples from the Old Testament but believes “the primal case of truth to power in the Old Testament is Moses speaking truth to Pharaoh.”⁹ Bruggeman believes that preachers today should emulate the prophets in speaking truth to powerful people and laments that Christian preaching and practice has been diluted. He speaks of “the extent to which our practices witness not to the God crucified and risen but to the constraints of technological, therapeutic, militaristic, consumerism”¹⁰ and encourages preachers to speak the truth of God’s Word even if it’s not popular as the prophets did.

The question is how to speak truth to power in an age when prophets are no longer recognized and when God is often an object of derision? This did not deter Joseph, Daniel, Nehemiah or Jonah who spoke the truth respectively to Pharaoh in Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar and Balshazzar in Babylon, Artaxerxes in Persia and the King of Ninevah. Hebrews 1:1 says “in the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways.” In 2 Peter 1:21 Peter writes “for prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” God spoke through men who were prepared to be his mouthpieces and to take the consequences. John the Baptist fearlessly challenged Herod about something as personal as his sexual morality and paid for it with his head. Presidents and administrations today often surround themselves with religious “advisers” who usually agree with their policies and ethos in the first place. This makes it difficult for these people to fulfill the role of prophet.

⁹ Walter Bruggeman, *The Word That Redescribes the World*, The Bible and Discipleship, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 20, 21.

¹⁰ Bruggeman, *Word That Redescribes the World*, 112.

New Testament

The Old Testament laws of governance were there for the good of the people and to restrain wrongdoing. In the New Testament Peter echoes these same sentiments about the role of government in his first letter, 1 Peter 2:13-14, “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to the governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.” Those who govern are to punish wrongdoing and praise or exonerate those who do good. Peter seems to be advocating that Christians should submit to whoever is in government whether one approves of them or not. These are Paul’s sentiments too in Romans 13:1-7. “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” So Paul asserts that God has appointed the governmental authorities and that civil rulers restrain evil by the threat of punishment for wrongdoing. Again civil rulers are described as praising or rewarding good conduct.

This interpretation of Romans 13 is questioned. There are those who believe Paul was advocating subjection to spiritual rulers and authorities. On the website God Is King it says,

People claim that Romans 13 says we are to be obedient to the State authorities. For them, the State is their higher authority. For us, the Kingdom of Heaven is our higher authority. Most people do not understand that there is more than one higher authority. They demand that we obey *their* higher authority - the State. This poses a dilemma for those of us who have entered the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus said, “You cannot obey two masters” (Matthew 6:24). A master is a higher authority. It is impossible to obey all higher authorities. We can only obey one authority. We cannot obey two.¹¹

¹¹ Understanding Romans 13:1-7,
http://godisking.org/understanding_romans_131-7.htm (accessed April 2012).

On the same website there is a comparison of translations of the Bible showing some to be less overt about the authorities being civil or governmental e.g. The New American Bible translates Romans 13:1 “Let everyone obey the authorities that are over him.” This argument reminds us of the context of the letter to the Romans. It says, “We have to remember that Apostle Paul was writing to the *Church* at Rome. He was not writing to the citizens of Rome or to the Pharisees. He was writing only to *ecclesia*, “the called-out ones.” When Paul said, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers,” he specifically meant, “Be subject to the authorities within the *Church*.”¹²

However, Peter’s words in 1 Peter 2:13-14 specifically refer to the king or the civil government as being those who are in authority. The God Is King website does not deal with this passage.

Although Paul may be commending obedience to the Roman authorities in Romans, the book of Revelation portrays the Roman Empire as the beast rising from the sea and attacking God’s people (Revelation 13:1-8). Dr. Steve Walton suggests the reconciliation of these two chapters is that while the government allows freedom of worship Christians should co-operate but when the government turns against them they should seek to call the state back to justice, and to bear faithful witness to Jesus – in the political sphere no less than in the private.¹³

Then the question arises in anyone familiar with the New Testament, what about Peter and John before the high priest and the Sanhedrin when they declare “we must obey God rather than men?” (Acts 4:19; 5:29). Does this mean we just submit to government

¹² http://godisking.org/understanding_romans_131-7.htm (accessed April 2012).

¹³ Peter Oakes, ed., *Rome in the Bible and the Early Church, ‘the State They Were In: Luke’s View of the Roman Empire’* (Carlisle: Paternoster/Grand Rapids: Baker 2002), 1-41.

when it's to our liking? The obvious place this takes us to is Mark 12:17. In response to some Herodians who were trying to trap Jesus with a question about the legitimacy of paying taxes to Caesar, he said "give to Caesar the thing that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." They were amazed at Jesus' answer for they thought they had cornered him with a question to which there was no right answer. This answer is often used to argue for the separation of religion and politics. Paul Woolley, director of Theos, a public theology think tank, says this interpretation "is an enlightenment construct, not a New Testament one. Jesus is clear that Caesar has some legitimate authority, but under God's authority."¹⁴ It does not mean God has no right over Caesar, but that God's rights do not exclude Caesar's. Woolley says "Caesar's exercise of his right to taxation might, on occasions, conflict with God's law – he might exceed his rights - but the right itself was allowed by God's law."¹⁵

The New Testament writers advocated a submission to government as all governments are appointed by God but they have a realistic view of these governments. They know Christians have been arrested for their faith, they know the corruption that comes with power and so when it comes down to the wire God must be obeyed over men, even men appointed to power by God. Down through the centuries Christians have wrestled with when God and when man is to be obeyed.

Before leaving the New Testament, there is the argument that Jesus used when standing before Pilate, "my kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Also Paul's second letter to Timothy 2:4 likens Christians to soldiers, soldiers of Christ "no one

¹⁴ Richard Baukham, quoted by Paul Woolley at <http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/files/files/Reports/TheosFaithandIdentity.pdf> (accessed April 19, 2011).

¹⁵ <http://theosthinktank.co.uk/files/files/Reports/TheosFaithandIdentity.pdf> (accessed April 19, 2011).

serving a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs.” Referring to these verses among others there are those Christians who believe that this world is governed ultimately by the devil and that the kingdom of God and of his Christ is above and beyond all this therefore we should not become immersed in political action at all. John MacArthur who thinks this way states in his book, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, “our end times theology tells us that until Christ returns, nothing can or will fix this crumbling world system.”¹⁶ He argues that we are wasting our time trying to make a better world as the Bible tells us it will get worse before Christ returns, and he quotes 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12 among other passages to support this:

For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

He says of political activism, “not only is it a battle we cannot win, it is also a battle we have not been called to fight.”¹⁷ He also reminds Christians of the sovereignty of God and no matter who is in the White House or Congress or the courtroom, God is on his throne. No matter what other nations threaten God is still in control. MacArthur has caused controversy by suggesting that “the US was born out of violation of New Testament principles” in that they overthrew the government of their day by disobeying Romans 13’s command to submit to those in authority for all governments are instituted

¹⁶ John MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009), part 3, Politics and Activism, Kindle edition.

¹⁷ MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, part 3, Politics and Activism.

by God.¹⁸ Questions arise as to whether Hitler and other dictators' governments were instituted by God. Were they to be obeyed? Where would the world be if William Wilberforce and Martin Luther King did not become involved in political activity and defiance of laws which they saw as evil?

MacArthur further argues in his book, *Why Government Can't Save You*, that God has called his people to be a kingdom of priests, not a kingdom of political activists.¹⁹ He claims not to be opposed to political activism but seems only to endorse it in the form of civil service like Joseph or Daniel. At the end of his book he includes a sermon by Charles Haddon Spurgeon which seems to undermine his own argument to some degree. Spurgeon argues at length that although our citizenship is in heaven we should still work to make the alien land where we live as good as possible. He uses the example of the Good Samaritan who sought not only the good of the Samaritan nation but of the Jews. He also cites God speaking to his people through Jeremiah in 29:7 "to seek the peace of the city where I have carried you captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace." However, Spurgeon expresses what is also MacArthur's fear that political involvement for the Christian means becoming involved in worldly ways of doing things and involves the danger of losing sight of our main calling to preach the gospel and bring people into the kingdom of God.²⁰

Two other authors, Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson, express similar views to MacArthur's. Both had been involved in the Moral Majority of the 1980s and both feel it

¹⁸ MacArthur, *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong*, part 3, Politics and Activism.

¹⁹ John MacArthur, *Why Government Can't Save You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), "How to Live in a Pagan World" (chap. 9), Kindle edition.

²⁰ Charles Haddon Spurgeon. A Sermon Delivered on Sunday Evening October 12 1862 at The Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, London, England.

had not been a successful movement. They cite the fact that we still have abortion, that homosexual rights have advanced, that divorce, illegitimacy and many other social problems prevail prove the failure in achieving their objectives. In *Blinded by Might* (the title taken from Zechariah 4:6, “not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit says the Lord of Hosts”) they assert that Christian Right organizations like the Moral Majority, Focus on the Family, The Christian Coalition, Promise Keepers et al. made the mistake of becoming married to the Republican Party. This then involved them having to defend other political ideals and ways of doing things that are not essentially Christian. It meant making non Christians partners and Christians who do not follow your political beliefs your enemy. They write that “one of the dangers of mixing politics and religion is that you begin to think the only way to transform culture is by passing another law.”²¹ They go on to show how passing laws are not the answer by giving the example of the failure of the Prohibition laws.

It would seem that the arguments these writers use against Christian political involvement is more about priorities and methods rather than actual involvement. Their main theme is that politics and government will not bring about moral revival in America. None of the organizations they criticize would claim that either. A cursory glance at the writings and sermons of Jerry Falwell, James Dobson, or James Kennedy would show they believe only the work of Christ on the cross can save human beings from sin and death and moral decay. Also contemporary writers like Chuck Colson who work hard to bring Christian values into the public sphere asserts that salvation of the individual is the only hope for humanity, “while human politics is based on the premise

²¹ Ed Dobson and Cal Thomas, *Blinded by Might* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 85.

that society must be changed in order to change people, in the politics of the kingdom it is people who must be changed in order to change society.”²² Colson, however, does not agree with Thomas and Dobson that Christians should back out of the political sphere completely.

All these Christians know what is essential to change lives but not all agree how. Rather than preaching the gospel **or** social activism it should be both together. From the example of Jesus and from the experience of Christian missionaries down through the years this has been the way the gospel has been shared. The Lord healed people and fed them as well as preaching the truth to them. Missionaries brought the gospel to far off lands but also built schools and hospitals. According to Alvin Schmidt, Christian influence on government down through the ages outlawed infanticide and abortion in the Roman Empire, instituted prison reforms, stopped the practice of human sacrifice, outlawed pedophilia, granted protections to women, prohibited the burning alive of widows in India, outlawed the binding of young women’s feet in China, ended slavery and much more.²³ The message of the gospel goes out in word and deed and people like John MacArthur are concerned that the main thing is not lost and that Christians don’t get caught up in worldly affairs and begin to believe that their political party has the answers rather than the gospel.

But he is ignoring many of the aforementioned passages of Scripture if he believes Christians should cut themselves off from public service and be immersed only in the gospel. Wayne Grudem’s response to those who say Christians, and in particular

²² Charles W Colson, *Kingdoms in Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 94.

²³ Alvin Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), “Women Receive Freedom and Dignity” (chap. 4), Kindle edition.

preachers, should not be involved in politics is to ask the question, “What parts of the Bible have you decided not to preach about because you are ‘just going to preach the gospel’ and not touch politics?”²⁴ Have you decided that you won’t preach Roman 13:1-7?” It would be difficult to preach on this passage without touching politics:

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For, rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Or that you won’t preach on 1 Peter 2:13-14? “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.”

Or, he asks what about the narratives of the Old Testament kings and their good and evil deeds? Are you not going to preach about Daniel’s influence on the government of Babylon? Or, will you not preach on Isaiah’s prophecies to the other nations in Isaiah 13-23? Are you not going to preach on the prophecies in Amos 1 and 2? What parts of the Bible are left out of your preaching by the idea that you’re going to “just preach the gospel?”

²⁴ Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible*, 47-48.

Grudem makes another interesting point. He asks “why did God leave Christians here on earth?” Why does he not snatch them away to heaven immediately? His argument is that we are left here on earth to preach the truth of the gospel but also to live it and to love our neighbor as ourselves, which really means bringing about good government and laws. God gives different gifts and calls people to different forms of service including working to make this world a better place for ourselves and for those who come after us. This brings us to the theologians and writers who believe Christians have had too little political involvement and been focused in the wrong direction.

Social Justice and Left-Wing Theologians

According to the New York Times exit poll on white evangelicals in the 2008 election, there was a swing toward Obama of 33 points among 18-29-year-olds and of 20 points among 30-44-year-olds.²⁵ This is a considerable change in voting pattern among evangelicals and points to possible different future voting patterns. Were these voters disillusioned with the Republican Party, influenced by the media, or excited by the message of new politically active evangelicals? The reason may be a combination of all three. People like Tony Campolo and Jim Wallis highlight the social justice issues of the Bible including responsibility for the poor and marginalized. They believe these are of equal importance as issues like abortion and homosexual rights and that the Christian Right has been selective in choosing their Bible passages.

²⁵ Mark Silk, *Slicing the Evangelicals*, blog posted by Sarah Pulliam Bailey, May 1, 2009, blog.christianitytoday.com/ctpolitics/2009/02 (accessed April 19, 2012).

Tony Campolo is originally a sociologist by profession and now a Baptist preacher and social activist. He describes himself as theologically conservative but politically liberal. His entertaining style in both speech and writing means people listen to him and he has some challenging things to say to those who call themselves Bible-believing evangelicals. He comments that evangelicalism has lost its way and it did so when it wedded itself to a particular political party, the Republican Party.

In a sermon preached at Mary Harden-Baylor University in September 2011 he asks some pertinent questions, “If Jesus lived in our society would he buy a BMW? When Jesus calls you to be a disciple what does he expect from you? What does it mean to follow Jesus if we took Jesus seriously?” He says that Protestants get steeped in the epistles and then get round to the Gospels and points out how the emphasis is different when you read Paul through the eyes of Jesus rather than Jesus through the eyes of Paul. To support his pacifist beliefs he says, “When Jesus told us to love our neighbor, he probably meant don’t kill them.” Also he mentions Mark 10 – sell what you have, give to the poor, take up your cross and follow Jesus.

Campolo is also one of the founders of Red Letter Christians, a group that believes in living by the words of Jesus which are often highlighted in red print in many Bibles. On their website and blog he describes who they are as this:

The goal of Red Letter Christians is simple: To take Jesus seriously by endeavoring to live out His radical, counter-cultural teachings as set forth in Scripture, and especially embracing the lifestyle prescribed in the Sermon on the Mount...By calling ourselves Red Letter Christians, we refer to the fact that in many Bibles the words of Jesus are printed in red. What we are asserting, therefore, is that we have committed ourselves first and foremost to doing what Jesus said...The message of those red-lettered Bible verses is radical, to say the least. If you don’t believe me, just take a few minutes to read Jesus’s Sermon on

the Mount (Matthew 5-7). In it, Jesus calls us away from the consumerist values that dominate contemporary America. Instead, he calls us to meet the needs of the poor. He also calls us to be merciful, which has strong implications in terms of war and capital punishment. After all, when Jesus tells us to love our enemies, he probably means we shouldn't kill them.²⁶

In his book, *Choose Love Not Power*, Campolo examines the interplay between love and power.²⁷ He shows how Jesus resisted Satan's temptation to power when he was tempted in the desert, he speaks of how God came to earth as a vulnerable helpless baby and not as a powerful Caesar and summarizes in the book's conclusion, "the God who sets aside power in order to live out love, fully expressing that love on Calvary's tree, is at the core of the Christian message to the world."²⁸ Like other liberal-leaning evangelicals he takes up causes like pacifism, environmentalism, economic equality. The usual hot button issues for evangelicals like abortion are of secondary importance.

Jim Wallis has been another of the pioneers on the road to the left for evangelicals. In his book, *God's Politics: How the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It*, he declares that God is neither a Democrat nor a Republican but he asks "when did Jesus become pro-war, pro-rich and when did Jesus become a selective moralist?"²⁹ An obvious refute to the Religious Right. He speaks of poverty as being a religious issue, war a religious issue, environmental protection of God's creation a religious issue and of a consistent ethic of life which includes being anti abortion but also anti capital punishment, anti war with its obvious casualties. Again he is highlighting how advocates of the Right are pro life only when it concerns an unborn child but not in

²⁶ <http://www.redletterchristian.org/start/> (accessed April 19, 2012).

²⁷ Tony Campolo, *Choose Love Not Power: How to Right the World's Wrongs from a Place of Weakness* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009), Kindle edition.

²⁸ Campolo, "Some Concluding Words," *Choose Love Not Power*, 3.

²⁹ Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 86, 208, 296. Introductions to parts 3, 4, and 5 respectively ask those questions.

any other situation including the child that dies because of poverty and hunger. He suggests they ignore important social issues like the environment and stick only to a few moral issues.

Wallis, like other left-leaning evangelicals, will say he is personally against something like abortion but does not wish to impose his values on society. “I’m personally against abortion but I don’t support laws against abortion.”³⁰

In his more recent book, *Rediscovering Values*, which deals with the current economic crisis, he suggests Christians are asking the wrong questions. The right question is not, “when will this crisis end?” but “how will this crisis change us?” The economic situation is, according to Wallis, “a spiritual crisis that calls for new self regulation.” He says that lying behind the economic measures of the market is a moral deficit that is increasingly apparent and a growing hunger to recover former values.”³¹

The Sojourners is Wallis’s organization. It is based in Washington DC and on its website describes their main emphasis as Radical and Social Justice, Life and Peace and Environmental Stewardship. Although Wallis states that God is neither a Republican nor a Democrat, he would seem to be a Democrat, even his earlier book *God’s Politics*, begins by suggesting impartiality but proceeds through the rest of the book to be a polemic against almost all Republican policies. Both Sojourners and Red Letter Christians support most democratic causes including the recent “Occupy Wall Street” protests. Wallis suggested churches should open up their basements to allow the

³⁰ Wallis, *God’s Politics*, 299.

³¹ Jim Wallis, *Rediscovering God’s Values* (New York: Howard Books, 2010), “The Wrong Questions” (chap. 1), Kindle edition.

protesters somewhere to stay and to be warm. To have criticized the Religious Right for being wedded to one political party they now have done the same. The final thing to cause doubt and concern about their political neutrality is their acceptance of sizeable funding from the Open Society Institute which is funded by George Soros, a billionaire who aggressively finances and promotes left-wing causes.

The rise of these progressive or liberal evangelicals has been a challenge to what had become the accepted Christian political stance. They argue that the whole Bible was not considered by the Religious Right. So, pro life was limited to the unborn child but didn't extend to capital punishment or war. The acquisition of wealth with no thought for the poor is shown to be contrary to the teachings of Christ. Jesus, by what Jesus said and did, showed us that this was of great importance for his followers. Indeed in his parable of the sheep and the goats, entry into his kingdom depended on whether those being judged had fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and visited the sick and the imprisoned. This culminated in the memorable phrase, "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." Matthew 25:40. How much more value could Jesus have placed on social concern than likening caring for the poor as caring for him?

The Minor Prophets proclaimed God's desire to see the widow and the fatherless cared for and for justice to fall like a rolling stream. In Amos 5:11-12 God berates the rich: "you trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you derive the poor of justice in the courts."

It is clear that neither side brings the whole Bible to their political philosophy. Although Jim Wallis quotes Abraham Lincoln who desired not that God would be on America's side but that America would be on God's side, it would seem that both right and left claim God to be on their side. Left leaning theologians are as selective about being pro life as Right leaning. It's ironic that Democrats for the most part support abortion and oppose capital punishment and Republicans vice versa. Both sides will cite scripture as evidence for their political philosophy. Obviously there is a difference in interpretation.

Interpretation

Few would argue that there are not plenty of biblical references and biblical examples of God's people being involved in the law and government and influence of power. However, different meanings will be taken from these examples or some will be noted and others ignored.

Those who see in the scriptures a more communal form of government will point to the Minor Prophets and to practical examples as in the book of Ruth of leaving grain behind deliberately so that the poor might glean afterwards. They will also highlight the early church's seeming communal sharing in Acts 2:44-45, "All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need," and Acts 4:32-37:

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's

grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement") sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

The believers here sold their possessions and laid it at the feet of the apostles for sharing with anyone in need. For some these examples would seem to support, at its most extreme, a socialist society where everyone gives their possessions and money to the government who would then be tasked with sharing it appropriately among its citizens. The lesser interpretation would be taxation where Jesus in Mark 12:17 and Paul in Romans 13:16 both affirmed the right of states to levy taxes upon the people they served. This money would then be used to provide communal services like roads and water and sewage provisions.

However, others would dispute this interpretation. In *The Christian Worldview Journal*, there is a series of articles called "The Economy of God's Law, Part 2." Here T. M. Moore argues that the present tax system in America is unjust and unlike the tithe system in the Old Testament or the early believers' example in the New Testament. He says, "graduated tax rates in this country have become the means for creating an entitlement society in which nearly half the population pay no income taxes at all and, thus, receive many services from the state at the expense of those who do pay taxes. It's not difficult to see how such a system of taxation can be used to curry favor and purchase political power."³² Those who think like Moore believe the creation of an entitlement society makes people dependant and gives too much power to those in government and

³² T. M. Moore, "Taxation: The Economy of God's Law Part 2(7)," published December 25, 2011, <http://www.colsoncenter.org/the-center/columns/viewpoint/17256-taxation,17> (accessed April 2012).

serves to help perpetuate those in political power. Such would argue for the Genesis principle of “man earning his bread by the sweat of his brow.” Also, Paul’s injunction in 2 Thessalonians 3, that if a man did not work he should not eat, would seem to support this argument. Paul underlined this by his own example and that of the other apostles who did not take anything without working for it.

The fact that there were laws concerning the handing on of property would suggest people owned it, particularly in the Old Testament. Numbers 27:8-11 says,

Say to the Israelites, ‘If a man dies and leaves no son, give his inheritance to his daughter. If he has no daughter, give his inheritance to his brothers. If he has no brothers, give his inheritance to his father’s brothers. If his father had no brothers, give his inheritance to the nearest relative in his clan, that he may possess it. This is to have the force of law for the Israelites, as the LORD commanded Moses.’

Property, especially land, was owned and passed on in families rather than through individuals. The laws ensured the continuity of the family and stability in the community. While our twenty-first century western world bears little resemblance to the conditions of ancient Israel, the need for stable families and communities is just as great, and the transfer of property from one generation to the next is merely one way to help ensure such conditions particularly in rural communities. Again Moore says “when the state claims a right to inheritance and estates, it exceeds the authority granted to it by God and compromises its ability to serve the people for good. The only justification for inheritance and estate taxes is an opportunistic one: It gives the State the power to appropriate resources for its political ends.”³³

³³ http://www.colsoncenter.org/images/content/wilberforce/ViewPoint_Studies/VP-Economy-of-Gods-Law-2.pdf, 15 (accessed May 2012).

The basic principle that influences this thought and others who promote more Capitalist ideas is original sin. Human beings are by nature corrupt, greedy and selfish. The wellbeing of the future will be built, not on material wealth, but on justice, true justice as spoken by the prophets. First expressed in love for God, and then love for one's neighbor. They believe that having wealth and ordering society would stem out of love for God and obedience to him. Therefore children would be taught and nurtured in a safe environment and taxes and money would be shared for those in need not those in greed or those deliberately made dependant and who are passing on the tradition through the generations. Human beings would have the dignity of those who are made in the image of God and part of human dignity is the ability to work. Government's role would not be to redistribute wealth or to decide who gets what but to ensure the weak and inadequate are provided for.

All sides would agree that justice can only be achieved through the gospel of the kingdom of God. This is why contrary to some beliefs, Christians have to be in the public square being salt and light and bringing God's truth into their community and eventually into their nation. Unfortunately, as we have examined earlier, in current politics it seems to be an either-or situation where people like Jim Wallis and the Sojourners will highlight wealth redistribution based on previous mentioned Scriptures, with the government doing the redistributing. Others on the Christian Right will emphasize the right to acquire wealth through honest work with the earner deciding how to distribute it. They will also emphasize the social issues like abortion and homosexuality as being of more importance than poverty and social exclusion quoting the relevant Bible verses. However, both Old and New Testament references may be found to make these issues "both-and" rather than

“either-or” This is one way pastors can encourage Christian political involvement by showing from Scripture the need for all these issues to be addressed.

Theological Application

The ultimate authority for Christians is God’s word. When we become involved in politics or when we simply consider how to vote we want to do what he wants us to do. One of the roles of the preacher is to interpret the Scriptures and also to apply them to current situations. How do we give people more than Bible verses to help them in elections and in community involvement? How can we help them to assess policies and political philosophies to see if they are biblical and in accordance with God’s will? This is not always easy.

John Wesley’s theological framework is still one of the most simple and most helpful. It consists of four things, the Scriptures, the church, reason and our experiences. This is referred to as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.³⁴ First, God has given us his word in the Scriptures to guide and teach us. The Bible will be our guide in how we vote and interact in politics. For example, one of the Ten Commandments is “You shall not murder.” A Christian will then take up the topic of abortion and say it is wrong to murder therefore it’s wrong to kill an unborn child. However, as we have discovered, it’s not that simple because the same person might well believe capital punishment is a correct form

³⁴Don Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press for Zondervan, 1990), http://www.theopedia.com/Wesleyan_Quadrilateral (accessed March 2012).

of punishment, and maybe a deterrent, for the taking of a life. They might endorse war and support soldiers who are ultimately trained to kill. Therefore, “you shall not kill” does not seem to apply in all situations, or does it? This is where we bring in Wesley’s second principle - the church. Of course the church is also divided on many current issues as well and there is no clear single school of thought.

Then, there is reason and experience which was Wesley’s third principle. Reason is the society’s ultimate authority so we should be careful in using it, but Scripture does encourage us to use reason and logic. So we recognize that if our soldiers do not go to war and kill then we may be overtaken and killed. If the Hitlers of this world are not defeated what is the alternative? This is where experience, the fourth principle is applied. Those who have lived through world wars or suffered at the hands of dictators know that “you shall not murder” needs many different applications. We submit to the Bible and to God but use our reason and experience to apply God’s word to each situation and to decide how and for whom we should vote.

Christian Worldview

Focus on the Family reports that a recent nationwide survey completed by the Barna Research Group determined that only 4% of Americans had a “biblical” worldview.³⁵ When George Barna, who researched cultural trends and the Christian church since 1984, looked at the “born-again” believers in America, the results were that

³⁵ Del Tackett, “What’s a Christian Worldview?” http://www.focusonthefamily.com/faith/christian_worldview/whats_a_christian_worldview.aspx (accessed April 2102).

only 9% held such a view. Barna's survey also connected an individual's world view with his or her moral beliefs and actions. Barna says, "Although most people own a bible and know some of its content, our research found that most Americans have little idea how to integrate core biblical values to form a unified and meaningful response to the challenges and opportunities of life." So, what is a Christian worldview?" It is the belief that Christian doctrine and teaching is true for everyone, that the bible is true for all of life. Barna's questions in his survey consisted of the following:

Do absolute moral truths exist?

Is absolute truth defined by the Bible?

Did Jesus Christ live a sinless life?

Is God the all powerful and all knowing Creator of the universe, and does he still rule it today?

Is salvation a gift from God that cannot be earned?

Is Satan real?

Does a Christian have a responsibility to share his or her faith in Christ with other people?

Is the Bible accurate in all its teachings?

Only 9% of "born-again" believers answered yes to all of these. Focus on the Family asks, "How does a biblical worldview get diluted?" They answer that we are bombarded with non biblical worldview ideas constantly from television, movies, magazines, books and in schools and colleges. Christians often absorb a secular worldview without even being aware of it. Often they end up saying, "this is what's right for me," almost apologetically. They unwittingly have bought into existential thought

which says “what’s right for you is right for you and what’s right for me is right for me.” They do not believe in absolute truth.

Chuck Colson and his organization, Charles Colson Ministries, are equally concerned about this and have launched the Colson Center for Christian Worldview. Colson says, “This online Center is the culmination of years of work to help believers understand, articulate, and live out an authentically biblical worldview. I believe in this effort so deeply, that I will be devoting my remaining years of ministry to it.”

There is no doubt it is a much needed resource but also much needed is biblical preaching that underscores a biblical worldview not defining faith strictly in terms of personal salvation. Colson says “we are not only saved *from* sin, we are also saved *to* something – the task of cultivating God’s creation.”

Since the Bible is true, since Jesus is the Savior of the world, then Christians need to take that to the world and not keep it in a church building. From Barna’s report preachers have a long way to go in instilling a biblical worldview in their congregation’s minds. This worldview would lead them to see the need for the gospel to be applied in the public square and for them to be there to apply it.

Responsibility of Pastors

We have already seen many biblical references in both Old and New Testaments to help argue the case that Christians should be involved in the political process. Those who argue that neither Jesus nor Paul advocated the overthrowing of the Roman Empire or any form of civil disobedience are not recognizing that in America today Christians

have the opportunity to vote and to influence government. The early church and their leaders did not have this right. Would Jesus or Paul tell believers who had every opportunity to influence their society and actually choose those who would rule over them not to do so?

Pastors can encourage their congregations to exercise their right to vote and to do so in an informed and prayerful way. Plato said “he who refuses to rule is liable to be ruled by one who is worse than himself.”³⁶ Is it advancing the gospel to bury our heads in the sand and one day discover we do not have the freedoms to preach, read our bibles or even worship as we do now? This may seem like an extreme example and without doubt regimes and persecutors have not been able to stamp out the gospel message. Who rules over us and how, is important and Christians should take that seriously and pastors should encourage them to do so.

Another way pastors can help is to encourage the new popular word “civility.” John Calvin Davis believes religion can unite America on the issues that have previously divided us.³⁷ In an appeal for Christ-like interaction he says we should demand civility from our politicians. We should also demand it from the media but the best preachers can do is teach it to our congregations. The polarization of our current political parties and the personal attacks on candidates for office and their families does not advance the debate and degrades us all. Christians can show a better way.

³⁶ M. Judd Harmon, *Political Thought from Plato to the Present* (New York: McGraw, 1964), 32.

³⁷ John Calvin Davis, *In Defense of Civility* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 157.

From the writings of Francis Schaeffer, most notably his seminal work, *A Christian Manifesto*, through all the organizations and movements and writings of the last few decades, to the Manhattan Declaration of today Christians have tried to carry the voice and values of God into the public sphere. They have made mistakes but is it better that their voice is heard than not? The preamble to the Manhattan Declaration: A Call of Christian Conscience released in November 2009 begins “Christians are heirs of a 2,000-year tradition of proclaiming God’s word, seeking justice in our societies, resisting tyranny, and reaching out with compassion to the poor, oppressed and suffering.”³⁸ This summarizes the Christian responsibility in this world as revealed in both the Old and New Testaments as we have already explored. Thankfully the signers of this declaration, who span many denominations and bridge many doctrinal divides, are carrying on this call to keep the main truth of the gospel before our fellow citizens. By doing so wrongdoing continues to be thwarted and punished, and the weak and vulnerable protected and cared for.

³⁸ <http://www.manhattandeclaration.org/the-declaration/read.aspx> (accessed April 18, 2012).

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this thesis is to provide guidelines to pastors on how to preach before elections. It has been necessary to prove biblical and theological evidence for Christians being involved in politics in general, and then whether pastors should preach on the subject. In the previous chapter we outlined the biblical examples of political involvement and the different ways contemporary preachers and thinkers interpret what the Scriptures say.

The number of books, magazines, blogs and articles covering this topic is overwhelming. In this chapter, we will select the main works which have influenced present-day writings and thoughts. Before we do so there is an interesting extrabiblical letter that shows how Christians were living and interacting in Rome early in the church's history.

The Letter to Diognetus

This letter has been described as one of the earliest documents on Christian apologetics. It is dated around the late second century. Diognetus was a pagan who was interested in how Christians saw their place in the world. The letter is a good presentation of biblical faith and an invitation to Diognetus to find this faith for himself. In a paragraph called "The Church in the World" the letter describes how Christians do not

separate themselves from the world but how differently they live in the world. “Though they are residents at home in their own countries, their behaviour there is more like that of transients; they take their full part as citizens, but they also submit to anything and everything as if they were aliens. For them, any foreign country is a homeland, and any homeland is a foreign country.”¹

These early Christians were living as God’s people in the Old Testament lived when they were captives in foreign lands. People like Daniel, Nehemiah, and Joseph all kept their own faith and culture while living in, and being respectful of the foreign culture. They were noticed for their faith and for their hard work and obedience being defiant only when that culture caused conflict with their God and their faith (e.g., Daniel would not obey the king’s edict to pray only to the king). He was thrown into the lion’s den where God eventually saved him from harm (Daniel 6). The Christians, who were of interest to Diognetus, were living as strangers in the world as the Apostle Peter addressed the Christians in his first letter, “To God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1 NIV).

The letter to Diognetus goes on to say that Christians are happy to be perceived as aliens. “As the soul is to the body, so are Christians to the world. The soul is captive to the body, yet it holds the body together. So Christians are held captive to the world, and yet they hold the world together.” Interestingly the letter also states that Christians reject certain practices common to the rest of society (e.g., they refuse to abort their children or to expose their unwanted born children to the elements). So, these Christians integrate

¹ *Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Early Church Fathers*, June 1 2005, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc2.v.xv.xii.html?highlight=diognetus#highlight> (accessed January 2012).

and are a leavening part of their society but keep to their own standards and values. So, here at this early stage in Christian history we find believers living in the world but not being of it. How this is carried out has been subject to interpretation for two thousand years.

Augustine (354-386)

A frequently quoted book in modern writing on politics and Christianity is another ancient work, *The City of God* by Augustine. Augustine defines two cities in which Christians dwell the city of man and the city of God. He writes, "The one City began with the love of God; the other had its beginnings in the love of self" (XIV.13). "The city of man seeks the praise of men, whereas the height of glory for the other is to hear God in the witness of conscience. The one lifts up its head in its own boasting; the other says to God: 'Thou art my glory, thou liftest up my head' (Psalm 3:4 KJV). In the city of the world both the rulers themselves and the people they dominate are dominated by the lust for domination; whereas in the City of God all citizens serve one another in charity."²

For Augustine there were two distinct worlds, one good and one evil. The Christian had citizenship in both and while the heavenly city was where he was bound he still had a duty to make the best of the earthly city. In fact he believed that Christians should be the best earthly citizens of all since they are living in obedience to God. Other people live as good citizens because they choose to or because they are forced but Christians do so because they love and obey God. He believed Christians' presence in

² Philip Schaff, ed., *Augustine: St Augustine's City of God and Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1890), XIV.13.

society should improve it because they are a community of people who live by the Law behind the law. The introduction to Gilson's translation says the role of the City of God is "to inspire men and women to organize their communities in the image and likeness of the heavenly city."³

Augustine captured the dual citizenship Christians have, living in this world but on their way to heaven, their eternal home. He believed "that which man builds man destroys, but the city of God is built by God and cannot be destroyed by man." Christians should live as model citizens holding fast to what they believe but making their society better and above all looking forward to the eternal city that would last forever. Writing as early as he does at the beginning of the church Augustine sees the need for Christians to be in the world but not of it. The pattern is the same as in the New Testament, Christians being the salt and light in whatever society they are placed and not isolating themselves.

Now, for the purpose of this thesis we take a massive leap in time from the days of Augustine to the 1940s to examine the works of the Niebuhr brothers.

Reinhold Niebuhr

Reinhold Niebuhr is described as "the most politically influential American theologian of his generation."⁴ He was a pastor in Detroit in the early 1930s but spent most of his life at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. This was where he exercised most influence, inspiring students, and founding Americans for Democratic

³ Etienne Gilson, "Foreword," in St. Augustine, *City of God* (New York: Doubleday/Image, 1958).

⁴ Robert Benne, *Encyclopedia of American Religion and Politics* (New York: Facts on File, 2003).

Action and Christianity in Crisis. Niebuhr was an inspiring teacher and social activist but his greatest influence was through his writing. His social ethical vision known as “Christian realism” is expressed most clearly in his best-known book, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*.⁵ Christian realism, he explained, was rooted first in the doctrine of sin which he felt had been lost in the liberal theology of the Social Gospel and needed to be reclaimed. He saw man’s potential because he was made in the image of God, “The fact that man ... cannot find the end of life except in God is the mark of his creativity and uniqueness.”⁶ But he also taught about original sin and man’s problem with sin. He was a strong critic of the moral complacency of the Christians of his day and thought the church was full of idealists who believed that love would ultimately conquer all injustice.⁷ One of his phrases has often been quoted “there is a difference in being a ‘fool for Christ’ and a plain damn fool.”⁸ He did not believe tolerance of foolishness was a Christian virtue. Nor did he tolerate scientific scorn against religion. He wrote about a doctor friend, under the heading *The Specialist*: “His intelligence is exhausted in the field of his specialization.”⁹

Niebuhr would not fit easily into any of today’s political groups. Both left and right claim him. There has been a renewal of interest in his thought and philosophy, even our current president, has cited his writings as an inspiration. Much of what Niebuhr wrote about and taught is still relevant to today. He warned against what is now called American Exceptionalism and saw it as US arrogance of power. He did not see the need

⁵ Reinhold Niebuhr, *On the Nature and Destiny of Man* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).

⁶ Niebuhr, *On the Nature and Destiny of Man*, 105.

⁷ Benne, *Encyclopedia of American Religion and Politics*.

⁸ Richard Crouter, *Reinhold Niebuhr: On Politics, Religion and Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press USA 2010), end of first section, chapter 7, Kindle edition.

⁹ Crouter, *Reinhold Niebuhr*, end of chapter 7.

for America to go to war on behalf of other nations. However, to the annoyance of some of his supporters he did encourage America to enter the Second World War.

Although he was keen to promote a Christian worldview he opposed the close relationship between clergy and politicians and was particularly critical of Billy Graham. However, Andrew Finstun¹⁰ argues that his view of Billy Graham was more complex than is generally understood.¹¹ Niebuhr believed that religion was the inevitable fruit of the spiritual nature of man and “religious intolerance and pride is the final expression of his sinfulness.”¹² It would be good to know what Niebuhr would think of today’s America.

Richard Niebuhr

Reinhold Niebuhr’s brother Richard Niebuhr, a Christian ethicist, was one of the first in this century to write about practical ways in which Christians seek to live in the world of politics and culture while striving to be faithful to Christ. His seminal work, *Christ and Culture*,¹³ has provided a base which has inspired further writing and thought. He writes that Paul in Romans 12:2 warns, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” “Jesus demands an allegiance to his Kingdom and love of others.”¹⁴ However, the church is also instructed not to love the world – “a

¹⁰ Andrew S. Finstun, “The Prophet and the Evangelist: The Public Conversation of Reinhold Niebuhr and Billy Graham,” *Books and Culture* (July/August 2006), <http://www.booksandculture.com/articles/2006/julaug/3.8.html> (accessed April 2012).

¹¹ Crouter, *Reinhold Niebuhr*, chapter 1.

¹² Reinhold Niebuhr, *On the Nature and Destiny of Man* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 1:189.

¹³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1956).

¹⁴ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 47.

culture that is concerned with temporal and passing values.”¹⁵ In trying to analyze all this he came up with a list of five types of Christian response to society and politics. They are summarized as follows:

1. Christ against Culture – Anabaptists, Christian pacifists, cut off from society.
2. Christ of Culture – the opposite extreme, the ethical demands of Christianity and the best aspects of one’s present culture are indistinguishable.
3. Christ above culture – classic Roman Catholic natural law ethics, the demands of the faith go beyond one’s culture
4. Christ and culture in paradox – classic Lutheran dualism, culture and the gospel co-exist in tension, with the higher duty to the gospel taking precedence.
5. Christ the transformer of culture – prophetic ethical approaches that seek to make Christ’s redemptive work real for society as well as for individuals.¹⁶

Niebuhr called the subject of this book “the double wrestle of the church with its Lord and with the cultural society with which it lives in symbiosis.” In the book he adapts the work of Ernst Troeltsch, the liberal German theologian and philosopher, to create this typology of how Christians through the ages have interacted with culture. Niebuhr seems drawn towards the final one of his five suggestions, seeking to transform society in the name of Christ and doing so by being engaged in social ethics.

He addressed the dilemma for the Christian of how to live in their culture and still be faithful to Christ. This interaction between faith and life in the society in which we

¹⁵ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 48.

¹⁶ Clarke E. Cochran, *Encyclopedia of American Religion and Politics* (New York: Facts on File, 2003), 98.

live is a debate that often leads to the extremes of Niebuhr's five statements. For some it's easier to cut oneself off from the world and for others the world takes over until Christians are indistinguishable from anyone else in their culture.

D. A. Carson

Almost fifty years after Niebuhr, D. A. Carson wrote *Christ and Culture Revisited*,¹⁷ a response and a rebuttal of *Christ and Culture*. Carson felt that the issues Niebuhr had tackled were important ones and that his writing still had influence and shaped even today's discussion.

The basic question continues to be how do Christians relate to culture? How much or how little should we be involved? Carson starts with Niebuhr as a launch to address these issues. He is quite critical of Niebuhr and suggests that his second point, Christ of culture, requires a "heretical view of Christianity and is therefore not applicable as a category."¹⁸ He further questions the wide net that is cast in all these categories and says that to suggest that there are multiple views of Christ and culture and that people can choose just one is incorrect. To limit oneself to a single theme of Scripture "is an affront to the wholesale acceptance of the historical-Biblical perspective."¹⁹

He also spends some time defining the word "culture" and the challenge for Christians to engage in it, which he feels is even more difficult today than it was for ancient Israel. He explains this, "In the move from the old covenant to the new, the focus

¹⁷ D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), Kindle edition.

¹⁸ Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, chapter 1.

¹⁹ Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, chapter 1.

of the covenant people passed from the covenant-nation to the international covenant-people. That inevitably raised questions about the relationships this people should have with the people around them who were not part of the new covenant.”²⁰ He translates this into modern culture and asks in what socially accepted customs should Christians participate today?

Carson approaches this topic from a much more conservative biblical and theological stance than Niebuhr. He lists some non-negotiables:

- a. the Bible as a whole constitutes the canon, not playing one part against another.
- b. God created everything.
- c. The human race is fallen, but made in God’s image, and
- d. God is sovereign over all.

The parts of culture that are not Christian are evil according to Carson and he highlights the new postmodern problems of belief in no absolute truth. “This reluctance to speak of truth is notoriously distant from the biblical writers.”²¹ He goes on to list all the social and moral issues prevalent in the United States including the resurgence of the “separation of church and state” cry that goes up with such frequency.

Carson took Niebuhr’s initial basic study and modernized it and applied stronger biblical theology, taking doctrine more seriously. He also challenges Christians to think seriously about their interaction with the world.

In the 1980s two important works were published which coincided with the rise of the Moral Majority and the Evangelical Christian Activism of that era: *A Christian*

²⁰ Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, chapter 3.

²¹ Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, chapter 3.

Manifesto by Francis Schaeffer in 1981 and *The Naked Public Square* by Richard John Neuhaus.

Francis Schaeffer

Schaeffer writes his *A Christian Manifesto* as an objection to, and positive alternative to, the Communist Manifesto of 1848 and the Humanist Manifestos of 1933 and 1973. He identifies two world views in America in 1981, the Christian world view and the Humanist world view. The Christian world view is based on the belief in a final reality, that reality being an infinite-personal God who is Creator and Law Giver. The Humanist world view is based upon the idea that the final reality is “impersonal matter or energy shaped into its present form by impersonal chance.”²² An example of this world view is summarized as “The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.”²³

Schaeffer believed that the United States was founded upon a Christian world view which is evident in its Constitution and Legal System. He appeals to John Witherspoon, whom he admires, the only cleric to sign the Declaration of Independence, and how he, in turn was influenced by the Scotsman Samuel Rutherford who wrote *Lex Rex*. Schaeffer writes, “Lex Rex means law is king—a phrase that was absolutely earth shaking. Prior to that it had been Rex Lex, the king is law. In Lex Rex he wrote that the law and no one else is king.”²⁴ Therefore, argues Schaeffer, the “inalienable rights” endowed upon each person comes not from man or the state but from God, the Creator.

²² Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), chapter 1, Kindle edition.

²³ Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto*, chapter 1.

²⁴ Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto*, chapter 2.

He says if they are from the state “they are not inalienable rights because the state can change them and take them away.”²⁵

Believing that the founding of the nation was upon Christian principles and belief, Schaeffer laments the subtle way in which the Humanist world view has crept into American thought and behavior. The Humanist world view inevitably erodes any objective foundation for legitimate law and order. This usurpation has proceeded so far that it is now forced upon everyone by the media and the courts. Schaeffer suggests “in some cases, such as with the Supreme Court’s ruling that abortion is legal, Christians may have to resort to civil disobedience to bring civil law back into accordance with divine law.”²⁶ Like Augustine he asserts that the materialistic humanist view can only base law on force. The Christian view, with its belief that Man is created in the image of God, can bring forth governments that are “more than merely the dominance of brute force.”

Schaeffer with prophetic insight saw the phrase “the separation of church and state” being used to silence the church. He notes when Christians speak out on any issue the cry goes out from the media and the humanist state that Christians and all religions are prohibited from speaking since there is a separation of church and state. Acceptance of this doctrine, says Schaeffer, leads to the removal of religion as an influence on civil government. He goes on to argue that “to have suggested the state separated from religion and religious influence would have amazed the Founding Fathers.”²⁷

²⁵ Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto*, chapter 2.

²⁶ Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto*, end of chapter 2.

²⁷ Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto*, end of chapter 2.

One cannot help but wonder how Schaeffer would feel today to see his own words and fears become so true. The separation of church and state mantra is used to remove nativity scenes from public places, forbids prayers before ball games, and recently caused the removal of an historic prayer plaque in a school because one school girl found it offensive. Those who accused Schaeffer of being an alarmist and scaremonger may have lived to see that his words were quite measured compared with what is happening today. The old formula of saying things over and over again until people believe them has some credence. It is amazing to see how many people do not know that the phrase “separation of church and state” is not in the constitution. This has been a personal discovery over the past year while researching for this thesis. Much of what Schaeffer wrote was prescient and there were those who took up the Christian Evangelical cause in the 1980s and did bring a Christian voice into the public sphere.

Richard John Neuhaus

In *The Naked Public Square* Richard John Neuhaus argued that a political doctrine and practice that excluded religion and religiously grounded values from the conduct of public business left naked public spaces in American life. “The naked public square is one where there are no transcendental values, no moral compass, and no absolute truths.”²⁸

²⁸ Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

Like Schaeffer he believed the “American experiment,” as he called it, was founded on Christian values and principles and as John Adams, the second president, said, “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”²⁹ Neuhaus’s argument is that the secular state has pushed religion out of the public square depriving it of the only element capable of giving it meaning and morality. He agrees that the Founding Fathers did want a separation between religion and politics but this was within the context of a very limited government. He decries the way the state has grown and now controls spheres where it had no authority before (e.g., the courts and education). In these public spheres the state can perpetuate a secular morality which is not in step with the thinking of the majority of American citizens.

Even more concerning is Neuhaus’s fear that the removal of religion and the result of a naked public square makes possible a totalitarian state. A totalitarian state, he reasons, is where absolute power rests with the state when there are no competing powers and no accountability to any higher authority. We are left with a government based on utilitarian reason alone, without morality. When religion is removed Neuhaus says an “ominous secular silence” will arise whenever we ask by what authority new laws are enacted.³⁰ It could be argued the ominous silence Neuhaus spoke about is greeting us now when we ask why a cross has to be removed from a memorial site, when chaplains in a cemetery are not allowed to pray in the name of Jesus, when Christmas trees have to be renamed holiday trees, or when a judge can overturn the democratic wishes of the people in a state as in California over homosexual “marriage.”

²⁹ Neuhaus, *Naked Public Square*, 95.

³⁰ Neuhaus, *Naked Public Square*, 284.

Neuhaus contends that the American experiment was meant to be based on Christian values and cites examples of reforms that have happened in America since the founding of the nation like the abolition of slavery and the civil rights movements. Both, he argues, were rooted in the religious thinking of their leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Abraham Lincoln, the latter he describes as the “foremost theologian of the American experiment.” He also quotes Lincoln who calls Americans an “almost chosen people.”³¹

While he welcomed the rise of what he called the “new religious right” he also saw problems with their excesses and how they sometimes portrayed themselves. Steven P. Miller in *The Naked Public Square Revisited* suggests that Neuhaus “positioned himself as a hostile critic of the new class left and a friendly critic of the religious right.”³² His sympathies are certainly with the right but not in any naïve way.

The warnings of both Schaeffer and Neuhaus were timely. People listened and responded. Those who argue against religion in the public square will say it made no difference or that the rise of the religious right hindered the course of religion in public life. Neuhaus might agree. But the question could be asked, “what would it be like today if these so called Right Wing Evangelical organizations had not been active in the 1980s?”

Although Neuhaus’s book is written in an upbeat tone, a sort of rallying cry it ends on a somber note. On the last page he writes,

³¹ Neuhaus, *Naked Public Square*, 61.

³² Steven P Miller, *The Naked Public Square Revisited, Religion in American History*, posted May 30 2010, <http://usreligion.blogspot.com/2010/05/naked-public-square-revisited.html> (accessed January 2012).

But the new thing we are looking for may not come at all. The naked public square may be the last phase of a failed experiment, a mistaken proposition. We have no divine promise that a nation so conceived and so dedicated will endure any longer than it has. Afterward there will still be laws, of that we can be sure. And the history books, if history books are allowed then, will record this strange moment in which a society was in turmoil over the connections between laws and the law, between law and life. Then the turmoil will seem very distant, for then no dissent will be permitted from the claim that the law is the law is the law.³³

This does not seem as melodramatic as it once may have done in the early days after it was written. The last two state functions, the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the memorial service for those killed in the Arizona shooting of 2010 included no pastors or rabbis. The Bible was read by the president, a psalm on both occasions, to include everyone. Is state-sponsored religion to be the future of America in the public square? Whatever concerns we have Richard Neuhaus and Francis Schaeffer both saw the very real threat of an aggressively secular America. Another observation made by reading these books twenty-five years on is that both abortion and homosexual behavior would not be spoken against as openly today as it is in these books.

Chuck Colson

Perhaps one of the biggest current contributors to the debate on Christian involvement in government is Chuck Colson. His wide personal experience as an insider both in the White House and in prison gives him perspectives that other writers and

³³ Neuhaus, *Naked Public Square*, 264.

commentators do not have. Colson served in the Nixon administration and went to prison for his involvement in what is known as the Watergate scandal. Before his time in prison he was converted to Christ and shares this in his first book, *Born Again*. Colson now heads up Prison Fellowship which he founded which ministers to prisoners and their families all through America.

Colson's books like *Kingdoms in Conflict* and its newer version *God and Government* are scholarly but more easily read than some of the previous books discussed here. He has the gift of being able to take complex subjects and make them accessible to ordinary people. His style is to tell stories, include pithy quotations, use illustrations and relate personal experiences which keep the reader interested and informed. Colson explores the age-old question of how to be a citizen in the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. It is a new way of exploring being in the world but not of it. He firmly believes that Christians should be in the public square. "As citizen of the Kingdom of God Christians are trying to bring God's standards of righteousness and justice to bear on the kingdom of this world."³⁴

Colson's radio work, his daily *Two-Minute Warning*, and his other media productions reach a wide audience and exercise influence that books alone never could. They are always topical and insert a Christian view or value into the hot issues of the day. He also challenges the anti-Christian bias in schools and the work place or the public arena. His newest DVD teaching series, *Doing the Right Thing*, is a six-part exploration of ethics. The sessions include, "How did we get into this mess?" "Is there truth, a moral

³⁴ Charles Colson, *God and Government* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 315.

law we can all know?” “If we know what is right, can we do it?” “What does it mean to be human?” “Ethics in the Market Place and Ethics in Public Life.”

Some of his main challenges concern the removal of moral absolutes and absolute truth from today’s culture. He fights against the moral relativism of the day and asserts there is such a thing as right and wrong, there is such a thing as absolute truth. This goes against the grain of popular thought which has crept into our culture unchallenged, except for people like Colson.

Another excellent DVD series by Colson is a four-part course called *Politics and the Christian Faith*. The subtitle says “Four Sessions on Why Christians Must Live Out Their Faith, Promote Freedom, and Be Good Citizens.” The first session asks “Is America a Christian Nation?”³⁵ He begins by speaking from the front of the National Cathedral and then the Capitol building showing how they were designed in a direct northwest/southeast line – symbolic of the fact that the church and government are equally foundational to the success of a free society. He argues that America’s founding, although having an Enlightenment influence, was based on an even greater belief in a “law beyond the law.” People originally came to America in pursuit of religious freedom.

The DVD series continues with the second session asking the question, “Should Christians be Involved in politics?” Among the issues he deals with in this session he asks if Christians should vote only for Christians. This is relevant in a time when a Mormon is running for the Republican nomination for president. However, nonbelievers have held office too. Colson quotes Martin Luther who said he would rather be ruled by a

³⁵ Charles Colson, DVD series, *Politics and the Christian Faith*, Zondervan Legacy Series, March 1, 2008.

competent Turk than an incompetent Christian. But he also gives biblical examples of seeking out ability and goodness (e.g., Jethro's advice to Moses).³⁶

Colson's last two sessions ask "What Is America's Church and State Problem?" and "Can Politics Save America?" To the latter question Colson says Christian leaders in Washington would say "no." He refers to Martin Luther King Jr., who said, "Law can't change people's hearts but it can prevent people from lynching others."³⁷ Also to the English reformer, William Wilberforce's statement that to change systemic evil, we must change people's hearts and minds. However, Wilberforce made big changes by political action. A government is needed to protect citizens as well as to order society.

This series of videos was very well received in a Pennsylvania Bible study group where attendees deemed it to be the most informative presentation they had ever seen on politics and religion. It provoked meaningful and productive discussion and taught a lot of people, including college graduates, some things they did not know (e.g., that the phrase "separation of church and state" does not appear in the Constitution). Colson also raised as an issue of concern the power the Supreme and indeed the power lesser courts have today in America, which he shows was never intended, "the Supreme Court has taken decision making out of the hands of the people to the point of making religious practices not only illegitimate but unconstitutional; thus the removal of the church's prophetic voice from culture."³⁸ He gives some court cases as examples of this.

³⁶ Colson, *God and Government*, 344.

³⁷ Colson, *God and Government*, 374.

³⁸ Colson, *Politics and the Christian Faith*, session 2.

Chuck Colson has made an enormous contribution to the politics and religion debate. His multi-media work continues to be a major guidance to Christians thinking about the public square and their involvement in it. He continues to speak prophetically into the issues of today.

Jim Wallis and Tony Campolo

In the last chapter we discussed the current theologians and preachers who have taken a strong stand on social justice, anti-war and fighting poverty. The books and blogs of Jim Wallis and his Sojourners Organization and Tony Campolo and the Red Letter Christian Organization have been a challenge to the traditional Christian way of thinking about politics and the traditional support of the Republican Party.

These thinkers along with others like Shane Claiborne question a political ideology that encourages the amassing of great wealth at the expense of the poor. The articles often published on their websites and blogs highlight this as well as being a strong theme in their books.³⁹ They question the belief system that is pro life (i.e., anti-abortion) but pro death by supporting capital punishment and being pro war. Although they criticized the religious right for becoming inextricably linked with one party they seem to have thrown their support behind the Democratic Party. Moral issues like gay “marriage” and abortion are not seen as priorities in the face of hunger, poverty, etc. These “new evangelicals” who have highlighted the faults and failings of Christian involvement in the past are making a valuable contribution to the debate and challenging

³⁹ Shane Claiborne, <http://blog.bread.org/2012/02/hunger-qotd-shane-claiborne.html> (accessed March 2012).

many traditional evangelical ways of thinking. Their books and blogs should be read by those who may not share their view for they do hold in check the things that are sometimes ignored over the thing people feel more passionate about.

One thing both left and right agree on is the necessity for Christians to be involved in public service and politics. Both are motivated by Scripture and obedience to Christ even though they interpret this in different ways.

Wayne Grudem

In 2010 Wayne Grudem's *Politics According to the Bible* was published. This book stays true to the title and Grudem keeps the Bible to the forefront in all issues. All topics of current concern are dealt with in the six-hundred-page tome, including specifics like water boarding where he asks, "is it torture?" to the discipline of children to larger issues like national and international relations and war.

Grudem admits to holding a conservative viewpoint but believes that it stems from his biblical research and that he did not have preconceived ideas. "I support political positions in this book that would be called more 'conservative' than 'liberal.' That is because of my conclusions about the Bible's teaching on the role of government and a biblical worldview."⁴⁰

One of the most helpful parts of this book is the five wrong views about Christians and government that he discusses in the first chapter.

⁴⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 13.

Government should compel religion. This idea was adopted around the time of the Reformation and was the motivation for several religious wars in Europe especially between Roman Catholics and Protestants (e.g., the Thirty Years' War). It is more evident today in many Islamic countries where the state religion is Islam and conversion to another religion is punishable by death. Grudem points to Jesus who never compelled anyone to believe in or follow him. Also he emphasizes the truth that a genuine faith cannot be forced.

Government should exclude religion. This is the opposite of the previous view which says we should completely exclude religion from government and politics. This is popular with organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union and others. Grudem argue that this changes freedom of religion to freedom from religion. He points out it wrongly restricts freedom of religion and freedom of speech.

All government is evil and demonic. This is based on Luke 4:5-7 where Satan claims to own this world, "The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, 'I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours.'"

Those who say all government is evil take from these verses that all the authority for the kingdoms of this world have been given to Satan as he claims. Grudem refutes this with Luke 4:6 where Jesus says of Satan "there is no truth in him." Satan often promises what he cannot deliver. Also Grudem points us to Daniel 4:17, "The Most High

rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.”

Do evangelism, not politics. This is the belief of John MacArthur and Cal Thomas among others that we examined in chapter two. But Grudem feels this is limiting our understanding of “the gospel.” The gospel, he says, is not just, “trust Jesus and be forgiven of your sins and grow in holiness and go to heaven. No, the gospel is God’s good news about all of life!”⁴¹ So he argues that when Jesus tells us to go into the world and preach and teach “all that I have commanded you”⁴² that means being involved and preaching about all aspects of life. He gives examples of how Christians have influenced governments positively throughout history.

Do politics, not evangelism. Probably this is the least held view among evangelical preachers. Few would believe that changing our political environment should be a first priority although Grudem believes this was the primary emphasis of the Social Gospel Movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although working to relieve poverty and eradicate crime and improve housing were noble causes they did not replace the need for the life-changing truth of the gospel in people’s lives.

By outlining these five false views of politics and religion Grudem then launches his views and the purpose of the book. He says, “I propose what I think is a better solution ‘significant Christian influence’ on civil government.”⁴³ He is not timid about naming liberal heresies as he sees them, those places where he feels Scripture is distorted, nor is he timid about taking to task more liberal preachers like Jim Wallis. He also

⁴¹ Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible*, 45.

⁴² Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible*, 45.

⁴³ Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible*, 55.

overtly criticizes the current administration and president. His book is a thorough and detailed piece of work, covering just about every topic relevant to our age and is true to the title, it is politics according to the Bible. Each subject is well supported by Bible passages or biblical principles. There are times when the Bible back-up can be scant; for example, in attempting to defend not taxing the rich more heavily he uses Exodus 20:25, “You shall not steal.” This seems a little inadequate, although he does make a good case against taking that which belongs to other people and there is no other word for that than “stealing.”

Overall Grudem makes a compelling argument for Christians having a role to play as salt and light in their communities, and that includes political and social involvement at all levels.

There are so many resources on this important topic; the few that have been outlined here cover a wide range of theological views and political persuasions but all would advocate the involvement of Christians in politics. Even those who advocate preaching “only the gospel” say they do not disapprove of people being involved in political service and when they preach through the Bible they will preach politics for it is there telling us not to exploit the poor and the weak, that people will be judged according to how they have treated the sick and the hungry and the prisoners in their community, and that Christians are to be salt and light (Matthew 25:45; Matthew 5:13-14).

It is impossible to be salt and light if we do not get out of the saltshaker into the world, if we do not lift the bowl that’s covering the light. The challenge is the same as to the early Christians and to Christians down through the ages, “being in the world, but not of it.”

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESIGN

A survey was carried out in the fall of 2011 in United Methodist, American Baptist, Evangelical Lutheran (Missouri Synod) and Presbyterian churches in Susquehanna County, PA. Desiring as many people as possible to participate, the number of questions was limited to just five and kept as short and simple as possible. The purpose was to ask congregation members if they would welcome advice from the pulpit on how to vote before elections. The results are enclosed in Appendix C.

Introduction

Last summer I intimated to my own congregation that I was intending to conduct some seminars on Christianity and politics before the November mid-term elections. These would be DVDS produced by Chuck Colson that would look at faith and politics in general and would not be pushing any particular party. There would be a discussion time to follow.

The response was enthusiastic to say the least. Even members of neighboring churches asked if they could come and I wondered if there would be enough room for everyone and hoped arguments and political fights would not ensue. However, by the time October came round and the seminars were to begin I discovered hardly any enthusiasm for them at all. Seven people attended, all from my own church. I made

enquiries as to why the sudden lack of interest, and one former enthusiast said, “It’s because we are sick to death of politics, it’s all we get on TV from morning to night, it’s in the papers every day, it’s everywhere, I am so tired of it I might not even bother to vote”! Others echoed the same sentiment.

There is no doubt that today we have an overabundance of information. Cable television, talk radio, newspapers, journals and increasingly the internet churn out tons of information about political parties and candidates. Chuck Colson has noted that if Abraham Lincoln or Stephen Douglas had walked down the street before the 1860 election no one would have known who they were. By contrast today we not only know every detail of political candidates’ looks but their successful election may well depend upon image, photo releases, publicity stunts. The most important members of any campaign are the communication officers and spin doctors.

Does this then mean that we should be silent? Should pastors, spiritual leaders, shepherds of the Lord’s sheep say nothing on these issues? There are varying opinions on the involvement of Christians and politics and whether pastors should preach about political issues. A recent opinion poll carried out in some local congregations in northeast PA showed clearly that Christian people would like direction on spiritual and moral issues which are also being dealt with by politicians. Almost nobody wanted to be told who to vote for, or which political party to support, but a considerable majority in all denominations said they would welcome advice from Scripture on these issues (see Appendix C).

How much weight should we give to a congregational poll? Would we poll the congregation on whether we should preach about tithing or personal moral living? Many might vote against it; in fact, one argument used against churches by those who refuse to attend is that “they are always looking for money.” We, Bible-teaching pastors, preach whatever the Scriptures say regardless of the topic’s popularity. We preach the truth because it is the truth and for no other reason. Why should we shy away from issues which are part of political campaigns but issues about which the Bible has a lot to say?

Taking this attitude and bearing in mind the congregational poll, it was arranged to teach the following seminars in my own church building, First Hallstead Presbyterian PA, to a group of pastors comprising five Presbyterians, two United Methodists, two Baptists and one Evangelical Lutheran (Missouri Synod). Also three lay preachers attended. All pastors broadly considered themselves Bible-believing, Bible-preaching evangelicals but with differing opinions within that framework both theologically and politically.

The seminars were as follows:

Seminar 1: Should Christians Be Involved in Politics?

Seminar 2: What Are the Social and Moral Issues Facing Christians Today?

Seminar 3: How Then Should We Preach?

Realizing the sensitivity of the subject and in order to maintain Christian love and harmony the pastors were asked to fill out a form after each seminar rather than have discussion times. Apart from maintaining peace it was thought each attendee would feel

free to be totally honest. However, they were happy to discuss and welcomed the opportunity rather than on paper. There were a few animated discussions but no enemies were made.

The three seminars were held on the same day, one in the morning and two in the afternoon. This was to avoid overburdening pastors by asking them to give up two days to attend such a course. A PowerPoint presentation was made for the first two seminars with discussion to follow, and the third seminar involved a short teaching time followed by more extensive roundtable discussion. The teaching outlines and notes are enclosed in the rest of this chapter.

Session 1: Should Christians Be Involved in Politics?

Outcome: You will see the importance of Christian involvement in politics and government both locally and nationally.

Objectives: You will see political involvement in Scripture; you will see Christian political involvement through American history; and you will be informed about legal requirements.

The Discussion

- Do congregations want guidance? According to a poll carried out in some of your congregations, “yes” but in a limited way.

- Do congregations want guidance on other issues like morality, tithing, stewardship?
- Do we preach the whole counsel of God or just what is safe? Is there a mandate for Christians involved in politics from the Bible?
- Our people are being fed tons of information from the media. Should we not be feeding them politically too? Are there “no go” areas for preachers?
- Archbishop Desmond Tutu commented, “Who’s to say religion and politics shouldn’t mix? Whose Bible are they reading anyway?”
- Or should Christians remain separate from politics and work solely for the Kingdom of God bearing in mind Jesus’ statement that His kingdom was not of this world?
- The misapplication of Thomas Jefferson’s “separation of church and state.” Many societies are using this actively to oppose Christianity, e.g. American Atheist Society, the ACLU, the Freedom From Religion Foundation and other organizations of similar views.
- Do we give in or do we oppose them? What is the right thing to do?
- Charles Spurgeon: “I long for the day when the precepts of the Christian religion shall be the rule among all classes of men, in all transactions. I often hear it said, “Do not bring religion into politics.” This is precisely where it ought to be brought, and set there in the face of all men as on a candlestick.”
- The controversy of being right; Anne Graham Lotz says, “I believe the Bible’s right.”

Summary: Do we believe the Bible is true? Do we believe it has something to say to our world? Do we have a Christian worldview or have we bought into the existential relativism of today, what's right for you, is right for you and what's right for me is right for me, thus negating any absolute truth? How we preach will be informed by our worldview. Is it truly a Christian worldview? Do we have the courage to speak "the truth?"

Political Involvement in Scripture

Does the Bible teach or show in action political involvement by God's people? Does the Bible teach or show non-political involvement of the people of God? Wayne Grudem takes us back to Genesis 9 to suggest political involvement from the beginning.

- Government was appointed by God in the first place. In Genesis 9:5-6 this seems to be implemented just after the flood. When Noah and his family came out of the ark God says that he will require payment for the crime of murder, and that he requires this to be done by other human beings.
- God establishes "the obligation to carry out the most severe punishment, the taking of human life, in retribution for the most horrible crime, the taking of human life." Grudem – "then the imposition of penalties for crimes is also validated, since if a government has the right to carry out the most severe kind of punishment, then it certainly has the right to carry out lesser punishments for lesser crimes as well."

- Anarchy is presented in the Old Testament as “a highly destructive evil.” Grudem cites Judges 18-25 to support this. Judges 21:25 summarizes the whole ethos of the day, “in those days there was no king in Israel (government). Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”
- Some form of government was necessary to enforce sinful human beings to treat each other with respect and ultimately to uphold the law of God. The Old Testament also shows us that God’s laws were also given to protect the weak and to promote the health or wholeness of his people.
- The laws in Exodus and Leviticus concerned the health and personal welfare of individuals and the proper and safe interaction between people.
- The Ten Commandments - reverence for God is commanded, and then respect for one’s neighbor and his property, and the parameters within which sexual expression is to be made.
- In the New Testament Jesus summarized the law as, “love the Lord you God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself.” He pushes the concept further when asked exactly who one’s neighbor is. The Parable of the Good Samaritan shows one’s neighbor to be anyone including one’s enemy.
- In the O T, *shalom* is “the state of wholeness that includes health, prosperity, security or the spiritual completeness of covenant. It is a wholesomeness determined and given by God. We should still work toward that.

So, the Old Testament laws of governance were there for the good of all the people and to restrain wrongdoing. In the New Testament:

- Peter and the role of government in 1 Peter 2:13-14, “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to the governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong.” Those who govern are there to punish wrongdoing and praise or exonerate those who do good.
- Peter -submit to whoever is in government whether one approves of them or not (1 Peter 2:17).
- Paul, Romans 13:1-7: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.”
- Peter and John before Annas and Caiaphas (Acts 4:19; 5:29): “We must obey God rather than men?” Does this mean we just submit to government when it’s to our liking (e.g., Mark 12:17)?
- Jesus - “Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” Jesus is clear that Caesar has some legitimate authority, but under God’s authority. It does not mean God has no right over Caesar, but that God’s rights do not exclude Caesar’s.

The New Testament writers advocated a submission to government as all governments are appointed by God but they have a realistic view of these governments. They know Christians have been arrested for their faith; they know the corruption that comes with power and so when it comes down to the wire God must be obeyed over men, even men appointed to power by God.

In the Old Testament the prophets played the role of keeping leaders and kings faithful to God and using their power correctly.

- The prophet Nathan and David, Elijah and Ahab. Walter Brueggemann refers to this as “speaking the truth to power” (a term hijacked by others today) and he says that Christians ought to do the same thing today. Speaking the truth to power is still vital today, but how?
- Joseph, Daniel, Nehemiah, Jonah were some of the Old Testament characters who spoke clear prophetic words to pagan kings. John the Baptist fearlessly challenged Herod about something as personal as his morality - paid for his truth speaking with his head!
- Following on the Old Testament theme of caring for the poor and oppressed, Jesus and the parable of the sheep and the goats - entry into his kingdom depended on whether those being judged had fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick and the imprisoned. The memorable phrase, “in as much as you have done it unto the least of one of these you have done it for me.” How much more value could Jesus have placed on social concern than likening caring for the poor as caring for him?

From examples in the Old Testament and the New Testament, God’s people are to speak the truth in the public sphere as well as in their places of worship. They are called to challenge authority when it is being used wrongly. It is clear that the moral standards of God in the Bible are the moral standards to which God will hold all people, regardless of faith, accountable. God’s people are called to speak the truth and to do the truth by

caring for the needy and the oppressed. Christians' political ideologies differ on how these things are done and we will discuss this later.

- There is the argument that Jesus said “my kingdom is not of this world.” The belief that this world is governed ultimately by the devil- the kingdom of God and of his Christ is above and beyond all this therefore we should not become engaged in political action at all.
- Such preachers say “just preach the gospel, change people’s hearts and then we can change our world.” John MacArthur is one: *Why Government Can’t Save You*.
- Wayne Grudem, “what parts of the Bible have you decided not to preach about because you are ‘just going to preach the gospel?’ Have you decided that you won’t preach on Romans 13:1-7? Or that you won’t preach on 1 Peter 2:13-14? What about Genesis 9:5-6?”
- What about the narratives of the Old Testament kings and their good and evil deeds? Are you not going to preach about Daniel’s influence on the government of Babylon? Or, on Isaiah’s prophecies to the other nations in Isaiah 13-23? Are you not going to preach on the prophecies to the other nations in Amos 1-2? What parts of the Bible are left out of your preaching by the idea that you’re going to “just preach the gospel”?

Summary: So, who do you stand with? Do you avoid politics because you believe the Bible says so or do you see the truth of God in the public place all through the Scriptures? Have I convinced you of one or the other? Let us take a break and think about these things.

Political Involvement Throughout American History

The Founding Fathers

Were they devout biblical Christians?

- The late Rev. Jerry Falwell, founder of the Moral Majority, thought so. In his book *Listen America!* he writes “our Founding Fathers ... established America’s laws and precepts on the principles recorded in the laws of God.”
- Many others in the Moral Majority, currently the most prominent is the Wallbuilders Organization, or in what has become known as the Christian Right, take the same theme. The late Rev. Dr. D. James Kennedy was among those who felt the Christian origins of America were now under threat - “Reclaiming America for Christ.” It’s only possible to reclaim that which was there in the first place. So was America founded by godly Christian men on biblical standards and values as these men assert or was it founded by good, moral, principled men who might better be described as Deists as others assert?

The Wallbuilders and Falwell

- The Puritans populated New England not to get away from religion but to form a society guided by right religion, everything they strived for was to advance the Kingdom of God.
- Colonial charters, like the one for Virginia, acknowledged God as both the source of the colonies' good fortune and their ultimate judge.
- George Washington and other Founding Fathers, e.g. Washington's Farewell Address, where he said, "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity religion and morality are indispensable supports."
- John Adams quote is a favorite among those who would seek to prove the Founding Fathers as Bible evangelical Christians, "Our constitution was made only for a moral and righteous people. It is wholly inadequate for the governance of any other."
- But was this God the God the Founding Fathers spoke of, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Would Washington and Adams feel at home with the current so-called Religious Right?
- John Adams, perhaps more than any other president, sought to discover the relationship between religion and politics. Adams was deeply affected by Old Light preaching as a child with its emphasis on reason and the human ability to choose the good. He wrote to Thomas Jefferson in 1750 that when he was four years old he had virtually memorized a Unitarian sermon by Jonathan Mayhew entitled, "Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Non Resistance to the Higher Powers."

- Adams saw God as the author of morality and religion and as the way to maintain moral and social order. I ask again was he the same God evangelical Christians in America today worship?
- Adams was not above using religion as a political tool when he was fighting Jefferson in the presidential election of 1800. Jefferson was well known for having distaste for organized religion and for closeness with the so-called atheistic French. So, what today would be called a campaign slogan went out by Adams supporters that said “GOD-AND A RELIGIOUS PRESIDENT ... JEFFERSON AND NO GOD.”
- Adams’ religious views probably more closely resembled Jefferson’s than any of the other founders. He was more influenced by the Enlightenment than traditional Christian doctrine and preferred the Unitarians’ emphasis on natural philosophy and reason to the biblical doctrine of mainline Protestant denominations especially the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. He certainly professed to be a Christian but detested the clergy as a group and was always suspicious of religious fervor and revivalist movements.
- What about the first president, George Washington? He speaks about “providence,” commends the Bible, not much about Jesus. J. Calvin Davis: W. could publicly pray to the “benign Parent of the Human Race” and he could give thanks for “providential agency,” but he would not invoke “the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.” Davis again: “religion was little more than a metaphysically underwritten moral code.” Washington blaming religious

animosities as “most to be deprecated,” letter to Sir Edward Newenham, October 20, 1792.

- Franklin commends Jesus’ teachings but sees them as corrupting when interpreted wrongly, Jefferson calls himself “a real Christian – that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus Christ.”
- So, some see Founding Fathers as moral deists. But others more accurate moral theists.
- Difference. Deists believe God created and left us. Theists he is still involved. Obviously others dispute this. Jared Sparks in *the Writings of George Washington*: “to say the he was not a Christian would be to impeach his sincerity and honesty.” He cites Washington’s response to Delaware Indian chiefs who desired their youth to be trained in American schools, “you do well to wish to learn our arts and our ways of life and above all, the religion of Jesus Christ.” This document could hardly be attributed to the religious right.
- Although signers of the Declaration of Independence included strong Christians like John Witherspoon, clergyman, and others like Benjamin Rush whose early work would be the champion of many today, founding the Philadelphia Bible Society and advocating that public schools teachings should be based on the Bible and that Bibles should be given to each family. Even he in later life turned towards Universalism.

Summary: Although the Founding Fathers believed in a transcendent moral truth, their beliefs were not uniform – Sam Adams - Calvinist, Tom Paine - anti Christian, Witherspoon - Presbyterian clergyman, Thomas Jefferson - Unitarian rationalist. It is

unlikely the Founders would recognize the modern evangelical faith of twenty-first century America. What do you think? Are the Religious Right claiming America for Christ or reclaiming it? Is it bad either way?

The Abolitionist Movement

One of the most compelling arguments for fusion of politics and religion. Christians on both sides. Some denominations e.g. Methodists and Baptists caused splits.

- Advocates for slavery cited 1 Timothy 6:1-5. OT patriarchs owning slaves. “Slavery not inconsistent with the word of God.” James Henley Thornwell, Presbyterian.
- Many of earliest abolitionists were ministers – Presbyterian and Quaker. Mostly in PA, NY and MA.
- 1775 Quakers founded The Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery.
- 1790 First antislavery petition presented to the US Congress. Too many pro slave proponents in Congress.
- Many preachers of all denominations railed against slavery and against the superiority of any man over another from Scripture..
- Rev. Henry Ward Beecher when war was imminent said that slavery violated the core sentiments of Christianity: “the most alarming and most fertile cause of national sin.”
- Not until 1863 when Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation after much bloodshed. Lincoln warned against triumphant rhetoric and called the nation to godly introspection. “The Almighty has His own purposes.”

Summary: Was it wrong of these Christians and churches to enter the political sphere? What would have happened had they not? Did their knowledge of the Bible and their belief in the God of the Bible motivate them? What do you think?

The Civil Rights Movement

Still no equality in America. Segregation. Black people not having a vote.

- Grassroots movement arose to end racial discrimination and any person treated as less than another. Again the churches provided the background to this movement.
- The aim to pass the Civil Right Act of 1964 brought the churches into the forefront of national politics. Mainline churches speaking loud and clear.
- Martin Luther King Jr. – brilliant young minister. His idea of a personal God gave him “a metaphysical basis for the dignity and worth of all human personality.” No divine right of one race which differs from the divine right of another. “Human worth lies in relatedness to God.”
- Nonviolent protests modeled on Gandhi. Soaring rhetoric and biblical language and imagery inspired many. Attracted critics too. Both he and the mainline churches were inspired to bring about change because of their belief in the dignity of all human beings made in the image of God. “An unjust law is no law at all.”
- There were still those like Senator Goldwater who said “you can’t legislate morality.”

- What do you think? Most of us know you can't legislate anything to do with personal belief and morality but you can legislate to protect and liberate others.

Summary: So, was it wrong for the churches and Christians to support the Civil Rights Movement? If they had stuck to working and preaching only for the kingdom of God and not looking outside the churches would we still have segregation? Would that be good? Was it biblical faith that inspired all this?

The Moral Majority

Following *Roe v. Wade*, prayer taken out of schools and other moves which were alarming Christians. By 1976 evangelicals were supporting a "born-again" presidential candidate.

- Moral Majority founded 1979. The term Christian New Right evolved from here. An attempt to mobilize the vast number of evangelical Christians in the country. Jerry Falwell, Tim LaHaye, Charles Stanley, D. James Kennedy.
- Became a force to be reckoned with. Claimed aggressive voter registration in Fundamentalist churches and gained 1 million new voters. This number is disputed. Ronald Reagan's success in 1980 attributed to them. He said publicly that "without God democracy will not and cannot long endure."
- Walter Mondale, his challenger, believed faith is personal and should not be mixed with politics. Accused Reagan of "trying to transform policy debates into theological disputes." Some accused the Moral Majority of being political

advisors rather than prophetic voices. Some felt the abortion issue was taken over by Republicans as a cynical voter ploy. Others feared religious political activists would impose their views and way of life on others. Fears of Dominionism.

- Moral Majority dissolved in 1989 but many associated organizations live on – Focus for the Family, American Family Association, etc.
- Divisions now run deep and that is the polarized situation we now find ourselves in.
- Reaction – more evangelicals voted Democratic in 2008 than ever before, rise of Sojourners and other politically liberal evangelicals like Jim Wallis and Ron Sider promoting social justice.

Summary: Where are we now? Was the Moral Majority a good thing? In abandoning the Christian Right are evangelicals doing the right thing? Or is it a reaction to some distasteful things done and said by the Right? Or is it the persuasion of pseudo-intellectualism? Influence of the media? Should we not work with the help of these Christian organizations to make a difference, at least, where we live in our community? Are we inspired by the MLKs and Jerry Falwells or should both names not resonate in the same sentence? Let's talk about this together now.

Legal Requirements

Supposing we agree we should preach politics, can we? Do we have freedom of speech in our pulpits? Constitution- First Amendment. Thomas Jefferson's separation of church and state was to protect our freedom of speech.

- Historically many examples of churches speaking openly for or against candidates. E.g. 1800 Rev Willim Linn of PA speaking against Thomas Jefferson. 1864 Pastor Lanphear endorsed Abraham Lincoln.
- Latterly, Jerry Falwell endorsing Reagan and the Bushes, Jeremiah Wright endorsing Obama.
- Legal problems arise over tax exempt status. 1954 Congress amended the Internal Revenue Code to restrict the speech of nonprofit tax-exempt entities. Sen. Lyndon Johnson. Penalty = revocation of tax-exempt status.
- Alliance Defense Fund is opposing this as unconstitutional and annually organizes a Pulpit Freedom Sunday. They ask "who decides what the church can and cannot say?" Should it be the government or the church? Can churches bring a moral and spiritual perspective to spiritual issues anymore?
- If we cannot say what we want in our own pulpits do we have freedom of speech? Most of us would not endorse any political party or candidate because we do not want to lose members of our congregations but we should not refrain from doing so because of the government.
- Groups like the ADF provoke us into thinking and perhaps acting on this issue.

- The aggression against Christian displays of anything in the public square is becoming troubling. But for our purposes we stick with the preaching aspect of our freedoms or not.

Summary: Would you/have you participated in Pulpit Freedom Sunday? Do you believe we should work to end this? Or should we stick to the gospel alone? What if one day we are not permitted to preach the gospel alone?

Session 2: What Are Some of the Social and Moral Issues Present in Our Politics Today?

Outcome: You will have examined current political issues which are also spiritual issues and should be of concern to Christians.

Objectives: You will be able to discuss from a biblical perspective **moral life** Issues: abortion, stem cell research, euthanasia, capital punishment, same-sex “marriage.”

You will be able to discuss from a biblical perspective **economic** issues: government control versus individual freedom, Social Security, health care provision.

You will be able to discuss, from a biblical perspective **war and peace** issues: just war, defense, terrorism, Islamic extremism, immigration.

Social and Moral Issues

It is impossible for us to examine all issues before us. The magnitude should all the more concern us in our preaching. I am pursuing the issues that are before us in the media and also the issues that seem to come up most for future presidential candidates. Where I can I will give the two political parties positions on all issues.

Abortion: *Roe v. Wade* (1973)

Bible Orthodox View

Exodus 21:22 Striking a pregnant woman, Psalm 139:13-16 God forming us before birth, Luke 1:15 The Holy Spirit will be upon him in the womb, Psalm 22:10 – 11; Jeremiah 1:5; Isaiah 1:13 – 17 and many more.

Alternate View

Genesis 1:7 Man came to life only when breath entered his nostrils, a child comes to life when it takes its first breath.

Facts

From 1973-2008 over 50 million legal abortions in the US. Number of abortions per day worldwide 126,000 approx.

- Not a subject for polite company. Touched millions of women. Good people in our pews.
- Personal, emotional, rape, incest, sensitive. Politicians usually asked about rape or incest. Very tiny percentage. Is it about the victim? Who is the victim?

Republican Party for the most part anti. Democrat Party for the most part pro
“woman’s right to choose.”

Summary: Who speaks for the unborn if we believe they are the most vulnerable of human beings? What about you? Is this something you should hide from or preach about? How does God view your action or inaction? Will the atoning work of Christ cover our silence on this? What do you think?

Stem Cell Research

Bible

Same argument and texts as for abortion.

Facts

In the process of harvesting embryonic cells the embryo is destroyed. 76 cases treated with adult stem cells. 0 with embryonic in 2010.

- Are embryos people or property? Appeals by Michael J Fox and other famous sufferers. What would the embryos say if they could speak? Who will be their voice?
- The idea of experimenting where there’s no pain. Do we cut up a drunk person, an unconscious person?

Republicans mostly against. Democrats mostly for.

Summary: Similar to abortion. Do we begin with the human being we can see and hear? Are there any other humans involved? Is it better to give quality of life to someone already born?

Euthanasia

Not as big an issue here as in Europe.

Bible

Ecclesiastes 8:8, Lamentations 3:25-32, Isaiah 53:11, 1 Peter 5:10, Romans 5:1-5, Romans 8:16-17 preserve life, persevere through suffering. "To preserve one's life is a duty" (Emmanuel Kant).

Factual Case

Terri Schiavo. Between 2002-2004 Parents wanted life sustained, husband didn't. Eventually died in 2005 through withdrawal of food and water. Oregon and Washington states allow doctor-assisted suicide.

- Should people be allowed to die if their circumstances are terrible? Is it more kind to put them out of their misery? We put animals out of their misery.
- How is it defined? The slippery slope. The Nazis.
- As health care becomes more expensive and people live longer, is Granny seriously in trouble?

Republicans mostly opposed the Terri Schiavo situation. California Democratic Party looking into physician-assisted suicide. The party is silent on this issue.

Summary: If human life is degraded in general is this where we find ourselves?
How do we assess who lives and dies. Who decides? What do you think?

Capital Punishment

Bible

For, Genesis 9:6, Genesis 4:11-15, Numbers 35:12-18, Exodus 21:24, Romans 13:1-7; **against,** Matthew 5:38, Exodus 20:13, Matthew 26:52, John 8:11

Fact

Graph showing ratio of murders and executions from Wayne Grudem's book. (p. 198). When the number of executions goes down number of murders go up.

The Discussion

- Do you believe these statistics are enough to sanction state killing?
- What about those wrongly accused?
- What about the opportunity to repent?

Republicans more for. Democrats more against but not cut and dried. Gallup Poll in 2008 showed for capital punishment 52% Democrats, 78% Republicans, 66% Independents.

Summary: So, is it ok to take human life from the state's point of view? Often those who oppose abortion support this and vice versa. RC Church more consistent and sees life as a "seamless garment" – a consistent pro life ethic. Against both abortion and capital punishment.

Same-Sex “Marriage”

Very aggressive LGBT campaigns both in the states and in the churches.

Bible

Genesis 1:27, Leviticus 18:22, Romans 1:27, Ephesians 5:31, Revelation 19:7

Facts

Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, California (complicated) permit SSM. New Jersey has civil unions. Don’t ask don’t tell no longer a military policy.

The Discussion

- Are homosexual and lesbian couples discriminated against?
- Is it against the constitution? Marriage is not denied to anyone, it has to be between a man and a woman.
- For Christians it’s not about state laws but goes back to OT and the basis for societies worldwide.
- Alternate view is that Jesus doesn’t say anything about it.
- Sodom and Gomorrah were about hospitality?

Republicans generally against. Democrats generally for. October 2009 Pew Research Center 72% Democrats favor SSM. 81% Republicans oppose it.

Summary: Does it matter? Is it important for the nation? What do you feel your responsibility is as a pastor? Has gay bashing has turned into bashing those who don’t

agree with it? What does the Bible say? Is it a sin that stands for all time or something cultural that changes with the times? Are we confusing compassion with acceptance?

Economic Issues

Keynsian view of government or lowering taxes and economic growth are the two sides of the argument in America. Republicans won't lower taxes and Democrats want to go after the rich. Is it obviously Christian to go after the rich? Is it that simple? How best can we provide for the poor? Will a political attitude feed the hungry and clothe the naked?

- Exodus 20, Exodus 21:28-36, Deuteronomy 22:1-4, Leviticus 25:10 allow for ownership of property
- Psalm 140:12, Proverbs 3:27-28, 2 Thessalonians 3:10, Matthew 25:31-46 working and responsibility for the poor
- Mark 10:21-27, 31, Psalm 37:7, 16, 1 Samuel 2:7, Matthew 22:17, Romans 13:6, 7 taxes and responsibilities of the rich.

Top 50% of wage earners paid 97% of all the taxes in 2006. Bottom less than 3%.

Top 1% paid 40% income taxes in 2006. 47% of earners pay no taxes. Is this fair?

- The creation of wealth, lower taxes, encouraging business growth.
- Taxing higher and creating more revenue in the public purse.
- More government control or more personal freedom.

Social Security

Covers old age, disability programs. President Franklin D Roosevelt initiated in 1935.

- Good idea initially. The needy must be cared for but when people who are working end up paying towards pensions for people who are earning more is it fair?
- Is it right that someone should just quit work at 65? Is it right to pay healthy people not to work? If a man does not work does he eat (1 Thessalonians 4:10-12). The dignity of work.
- Personal responsibility. Show Ronald Reagan quote.
- Bankruptcy of Social Security. Should it be privatized? What is the best stewardship of other peoples' money?

Health Care

Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (March 23, 2010) signed into law.

Objections

- Government not very good at running anything.
- Decline in revenue will mean a decline in quality of care.
- Government will decide what type of care you will get.
- From a British perspective I can tell you that it is not always good although overall the NHS is a blessing.

- Some say the very people who fight for “a woman’s right to choose” will not allow you the right to choose your own health care.
- People want to keep control of one of the most valuable things they have, their own health.

Facts

46 million people are without health insurance. Is that figure accurate? Insurance companies making millions and in some cases controlling your health care. Is that right?

Bible

1 Thessalonians 5:15, “Seek that which is good for one another and for all people.” Galatians 6:2, “Bear one another’s burdens and thus fulfil the law of Christ.”

The OT has lots of health laws about maintaining good health and avoiding sickness. “The temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), to be stewards of our own health but also to look out for others.

Republicans offered an alternative plan claiming 18.8 million is the true figure for people unable to get health insurance, approx 6.1% of the pop. So, they ask, why does the government need to control the other 94%? Is that a reasonable question?

Summary: What is the Christian way to order our society economically? Is there clear guidance from Scripture? The minor prophets and Matthew 25. Jesus and the poor. Should we spend our own money or should the government spend our money? Personal freedom and its strength and power.

Christians differ on the interpretation of these issues with the Jim Wallis, Tony Campolo type of evangelicals emphasizing our responsibility to the poor as important as ethical issues like abortion. Is it? Can we do both? Are many Christians already doing both? Are many ignoring Matthew 25?

War and Peace

Is there such a thing as a just war?

Bible

Proverbs 24:11, 1 John 3:16-18, Psalm 144:1, Psalm 82:3-4, Matthew 5:9;
Deuteronomy 20 – list of rules for war. God at war with Satan from the beginning.

The Discussion

- Was the Civil War a just war? World War II? Vietnam? Iraq? Afghanistan? Libya? Egypt?
- Most Christians agree war is a necessary evil but might quibble over which are necessary and which are not. Should a Christian country take the initiative or only defend?
- Pacifists who believe “turn the other cheek” and “you shall not kill” applies even at national level. Stanley Hauerwas: “I believe I need to be nonviolent for that is what God was on the cross.”
- Lots of wars in the OT but Jesus certainly did not advocate violence against the Romans or any of his enemies; healing the soldier’s ear when Peter cut it off in the Garden of Gethsemene.

Summary: What should be the Christian pastor's sermon at a time of war? How do we support our military? Should we not all support each other in war? Vietnam War lost in the streets of America.

Defense

Bible

Exodus 15:3, "The Lord is a man of war." Cf Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers"

Psalms 3 and 7, David calls upon God to be his defense including in times of battle.

Facts

US spends a lot on its military – Budget for 2009 was \$487.7billion, 6% over 2008's budget.

The Discussion

- Can this money be better spent?
- Republicans tend to want to increase Democrats decrease spending. Story from William Manchester's "Alone" re Churchill and fighter planes (p. 123).

Hugh Hewitt

- What do we do with the Hitlers and Saddam Husseins of this world? Why don't we go after the Mugabes of this world? Are we well motivated?

- The killing of Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. Was that right? Is that how America does things?

Terrorism

Psalm 46, Psalm 37:11-13, Galatians 5:1 created for freedom

George W. Bush in a speech about terrorism referred to Amalek in the OT.

Amalek attacked the rear so that his soldiers could attack women and children, the elderly and the infirm and not the opposing soldiers at the front. He likened this to terrorism not warfare.

People who blow up planes (9/11), shoot indiscriminately (Fort Hood) are not at war; they are not in a fair fight, they are terrorists.

Islamic Extremism

- Like homosexuality and abortion, Islam has become one of those things not to be talked about, and if you do you become a “phobe” – e.g. homophobe, islamaphobe. This labels you as a hater and a hater won’t be heard by anyone.
- Even the media and government won’t say terrorist acts were committed by Islam extremists when they clearly are.
- IDOP many pastors won’t observe it because persecuted Christians are for the most part in Islamic countries. Are we asleep while this great threat looms around you and plots against us? Have you ever addressed this as a prayer request or in a sermon?

- Islamofascists are up front about who their enemies are – Jews and Christians, America and Israel. If your enemy tells you he's your enemy shouldn't we listen at least and take action?
- John 16:33, "In this world you will have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

Summary: Do you feel it's important to defend your country? Do you feel too much is spent? What would be an appropriate figure? Would the money be better spent on hospitals, schools, etc.? How do we defend ourselves against terrorists? Do we know who our enemies are? In not wanting to demonize a particular people are we ignoring clear dangers?

Immigration

Hebrews 13:2, 1 Peter 2:11: Strangers to be welcomed, we are strangers here until we go to heaven. Romans 13:1, Each person being subject to the law.

So, this nation is a nation of immigrants since the *Mayflower* landed. "Give me your huddled masses" says the inscription on the Statue of Liberty.

- The biblical mandate is to welcome the stranger but the stranger is subject to the law so the problem is ILLEGAL immigration.
- Open borders especially with Mexico. Is this a terrorist threat?
- People like Archbishop Chaput of Denver believes people who entered the US illegally broke the law but did they sin? So, do people who want to enforce the law without mercy violate Christ's commands about the homeless and poor?

- Where do we draw the line between compassion and mercy and national security? By endorsing illegal immigration do we demean the person who comes here legally?

Summary: What is the Christian response? How do we balance welcoming the stranger with our own security? This is not a problem here? If you were in Arizona or Texas how would you preach?

Session 3: How Then Should We Preach?

Outcome: You will be able to preach on relevant issues before elections with conviction and confidence.

Objectives: You will see the influence sermons can have before elections by examining two from 2008; you will encourage your congregation to see their Christian duty is to vote; you will learn where to find resources to be well informed; and you will preach only from Scripture being sensitive to differing opinions and have the courage to speak the truth in love.

How Do Other People Preach Before Elections?

The best-known political preacher from before the 2008 election was Rev. Jeremiah Wright. We will examine the full transcript of one of his sermons. Pastor Greg Addison of the First Baptist Church of Cabot AR. We will read one of his sermons. We

will discuss these sermons together, or you may take them with you and return the questionnaire with your thoughts on them.

Encouraging Your Congregation to Vote

Alexis de Tocqueville said that in a democracy, we get the government we deserve. This is true especially if we don't vote.

Why Should We Vote?

President Lyndon B Johnson - voting is "the first duty of democracy." Yet only around 50% of the population exercises their vote. In 2008 only 35% of evangelicals voted. Pollsters say this may not be an accurate figure as the term "evangelical" is hard to define. Even allowing for a considerable margin of error this is a small percentage of Christians who take the opportunity to influence their nation's moral and economic ethos.

Of the small percentage who did vote *Christianity Today* states, "In 2008 Obama didn't win a majority of evangelicals in any state. No surprise there. But there was some question about whether Obama's support with evangelicals would draw one out of three evangelical voters (as Clinton did in 1992) or one out of four (as Kerry did in 2004). The answer is closer to the latter: Exit polls say 26 percent of American voters called themselves evangelical or born-again Christians, and of these, 74 percent voted for

McCain, with 25 percent voting for Obama. (Another measure put the percentage of evangelicals at 23 percent, with 73 percent voting for McCain, 26 percent for Obama.)”

- Many in our world do not have this privilege.
- Think of the Iraqi: people with their purple thumb/fingers risking everything.
- People fought for this right for you.
- If you do not exercise this right you have neglected to influence the country for good and for God.
- Plato: “he who refuses to rule is liable to be ruled by one who is worse than himself.”
- Christians in so many countries have no rights; we can influence who governs us by our vote. We should use it. In fact we are wrong not to use it.

Should We Always Vote for Christians?

- St. Augustine *The City of God* taught that “The City of Man is populated by those who love themselves and hold God in contempt, while the City of God is populated by those who love God and hold themselves in contempt.”
Augustine hoped to show that the citizens of the City of God were more beneficial to the interests of Rome than those who inhabit the City of Man. A Christian will want to vote for a citizen of God’s city if there is a clear choice between him and an unbeliever. That is not always a clear cut choice in elections.
- Martin Luther “I would rather be governed by a competent Turk than an incompetent Christian.”

- We do want to vote for a person of character, who will reflect Christian values.

An article in a British newspaper in 2005 stated that they found it sinister that there were prayer meetings and Bible studies in the White House. Do you feel that's sinister? Would it please you? Is it more sinister to have a president who acknowledges his need of a higher power or one who feels totally competent by himself?

Resources

How do we know who's telling the truth? The media have their slant.

- Always go directly to the party and candidate and see what they say they stand for.
- There are lots of online resources to help like Focus on the Family, the American Family Association. Would you be guided by such organizations?
- Would you rather be guided by the Sojourners and Jim Wallis?
- Also familiarize yourselves with the Manhattan Declaration.

Francis Schaeffer freshly introduced Christians and politics to each other in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1981 *A Christian Manifesto*, which was written as a rebuff to the Communist Manifesto, was prophetic in predicting a world of government without God. Many saw him as a crazy alarmist but his fear of a secular, humanist public sphere was all too accurate. His writings are as timely as ever. In a strange irony his eponymous son

often appears on talk shows trashing his late father's views and promoting opposite values.

How Then Shall We Preach?

We need courage to preach on contentious issues if we feel the Bible has something clear to say. Here are some words to encourage us to have courage!

“Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees all others.” (Winston Churchill)

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in the moments of comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy. Courage faces fear and thereby masters it; cowardice represses fear and is thereby mastered by it. We must constantly build dikes of courage to hold back the flood of fear.” (Martin Luther King Jr.)

“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” (Matthew 10:16)

“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32)

Do we have a Christian worldview? Do we truly believe it is God's Word and therefore relevant and necessary to all aspects of public life as well as personal life?

- It takes courage to speak God's truth to power these days.

- It takes courage to preach on hot button issues about which God's Word speaks clearly.
- We must pray.
- We must do our part to preserve and shine as God's servants.
- Everything must be done in love.
- In these days of polarized policies can Christian preachers address the issue of civility, true civility, and show it by their actions?
- We must preach the truth no matter how unpalatable. The temptation is to run and hide but we must confess Him before men.

Above all, love your neighbor as yourself!

CHAPTER 5

OUTCOMES

The purpose of this thesis project is to convince pastors of their responsibility to preach relevant and helpful sermons before elections. In our twenty-first-century world there is information overload from news media, talk radio, online magazines, blogs, DVDs, journals, Facebook and Twitter. Few of these would claim to be impartial in their reporting or commentating, with most admitting to pushing their own political viewpoints.

When congregations' minds are being fed a continuous daily diet from all these sources it is imperative that pastors feed their minds and souls from the Word of God. This was the conviction behind the presentation of the seminars on preaching and politics. In spite of the skill and technological advantages of the media, preachers know that, "a power comes through the preached word that even the written word cannot replace" as Haddon Robinson says in his book *Biblical Preaching*.¹ He goes on to explain how expository preaching has to be applied to peoples' lives, that people do not need archaeological or historical sermons, but ones that relate to their daily experience of life, "Our expository sermons today will be ineffective unless we realize that our listeners, too, exist at a particular address and have mind-sets unique to them."² We must apply God's Word to every aspect of our congregations' lives if we are to preach the whole counsel of God. How can preachers ignore the political and social environment in which

¹ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 19.

² Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 28.

their people live and move and work? With this in mind the attendees at the three seminars participated fully in all discussions.

This is not a popular subject amongst all preachers in northeast PA. About 70% of the number of those invited attended and some came only to help the researcher out. Some pastors were busy but others expressed no interest in politics, some in a condescending manner, “I’ve got a higher calling than that.” Ten pastors attended and three lay preachers/elders. The seminars were all presented on one day and most felt there was too much information to be dealt with in such a short time.

Of those who did attend, most acknowledged their own political persuasion as Republican or conservative but there were two independents and two Democratic voters. All admitted that they tended to shy away from political issues, mostly so that they would not upset their congregation or lose members. There was a sense of conviction that they were not being faithful as expository preachers, as most claimed to be, if they were not bringing the truth of God’s word into issues that are so important. A general discussion took place on the nature of expository preaching before the seminars began. Some felt you had to preach on all issues when you preach your way through books of the Bible. Others felt you could also ensure that you avoid certain topics if you choose wisely.

Discussion Summary from Session 1

Biblical Evidence

There was general agreement that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments showed clear evidence of Christians being involved in their communities in political ways. Not all agreed that the texts examined showed that pastors should actually preach about such things. This led to a discussion on expository and biblical preaching and Wayne Grudem's assertion that if we do not preach politics we will omit large chunks of the Bible?³ A fruitful discussion took place on the nature of preaching. All confessed that in the pulpit they often avoided topics that are uncomfortable or controversial and that are therefore often not faithful to God's word. The prophets, the Apostles, Jesus all said difficult unpopular things. This led to the observation, "yes, but look what happened to them." It was agreed that being faithful to the whole of Scripture would not make preachers popular but if they believe that, in its entirety, it is the infallible Word of God then they must preach, interpret and apply *all* of it to peoples' lives in the culture in which they live. All agreed that congregations are influenced by the politics of the land, that it is part of what defines them, and that preachers must teach them what the Bible has to say.

³ Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 47.

Founding Fathers

After the first seminar there was much discussion about whether the Founding Fathers were Bible-believing Christians who would be comfortable in our evangelical churches. Some felt strongly that they were, and had read literature like Peter Lillback's book on George Washington.⁴ Others had seen DVDs by the Wallbuilders organization⁵ or others that led them to be confident the Founding Fathers were and that America was founded on such values. However, as we examined the actual quotes and writings most acknowledged that they were indeed God fearing men who respected the Bible and did apply its principles to the founding of the nation but that they all had diverse personal beliefs.

Some suggested we would get stronger evidence of evangelical biblical belief if we went further back in the nation's history to the early settlers and pilgrims.

Abolitionist and Civil Rights Movements

There was some discussion on the Civil Rights Movement and the Abolitionist Movement. Those who believe that Christians should not be involved in the public arena, nor that preachers should preach about political issues said they believed God would have brought about deliverance for all in His time. However, most believed that people like Wilberforce and Martin Luther King Jr. were indeed right to take the Gospel to the public square and apply its truth so that people could be liberated.

⁴ Peter A. Lillback, *George Washington's Sacred Fire* (Philadelphia: Providence Forum Press, 2006).

⁵ Wallbuilders, *America's Godly Heritage*, DVD, director David Barton.

Moral Majority

The Moral Majority again caused much discussion with most believing they had been a force for good even when they didn't always stick to biblical principles and became totally aligned with one party. Some, however, felt they had done more harm than good and had actually gotten evangelicals a bad name. They suggested this was the reason why there was aggressive anti evangelical feelings in the country and they made the point that abortion and gay practice is even more with us today than then and religion is actually being removed from public places. So, they asked, "what did the Moral Majority actually achieve?" Most felt supportive of their actions and some had been involved through volunteer help or financial assistance and did not regret it.

Pulpit Freedom Sunday

None of the pastors attending the seminars had ever adopted the practice of Pulpit Freedom Sunday. Although all believed they should have freedom to preach and say whatever they like from their pulpits without interference from the IRS or anyone else they still did not wish to preach a political sermon. There was some discussion as to what a political sermon is and most said they did not avoid difficult issues when they come up in the lectionary or if they preach through a Bible book.

Discussion Summary from Session 2

Life and Death Issues

Most pastors felt the moral equivalence made by some between **abortion** and **capital punishment** was wrong. They felt that someone who had taken the life of one or more people, received a fair trial and been sentenced to death was a far cry from a helpless unborn baby who received no fair trial and who had not taken anyone else's life. Nevertheless there was a consideration of the "seamless thread" of life as proposed by the Roman Catholic Church which proposes to be pro life in all situations.

All felt capital punishment should only be applied where there is incontrovertible evidence and all confessed that they would not want to be the administrator of the lethal injection. One pastor reported that a huge anti-abortion billboard advertisement placed just as one enters a local town had caused his youth group much fury and some said it had actually turned them against pro life people. Another pastor who goes to the Pro Life March in Washington each year surprised the group by saying he really didn't think the government should tell a woman what to do with her body. The argument that the government was protecting the child didn't resonate with him.

Euthanasia

Euthanasia was not seen as a pressing issue in our culture although it had become more of an issue in Europe. There was some concern that with Government provided

health care perhaps “granny” might truly be in danger by being at the back of the line. It was hoped healthcare would not come under government control although all recognized the biblical injunctions to care for the weak and poor in society. Most felt this worked better when the churches were doing it but felt there had to be some government help as well. Nobody had any solutions.

Homosexuality

All pastors felt weary of this topic. It has now become an issue in several of our denominations and has become a very emotive subject. Many were tired of the whole debate but nobody saw it going away any time soon. All were sure of the Bible’s prohibition of homosexual practice but felt compassion should be shown to those with genuine struggles. The cliché “love the sinner but hate the sin” was repeated but the practical outworking of that were discussed. There was concern about how this is taught as a valid lifestyle choice in schools and how our young people are being brain washed. All agreed we had to be equally condemning of heterosexual sin.

Economic Issues

There was the usual discussion over government control and individual freedom with regard to the economy. Again all were aware of their Christian duty to help the poor and the many references in the Gospels by Jesus to the perils of wealth and the possibility that “a man might gain the whole world and still lose his own soul,” (Mark 8:36 NIV) and “how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God,” (Luke 18:24 NIV). All

felt that the Capitalist system had made America rich and consequently out of her riches America is able to help many poorer nations and does. There is the danger of greed and it was noted not many rich people are happy but also many rich people are philanthropic. The creation of wealth might make everyone richer but still increases the gap between the “haves” and “have-nots.” However, the many Bible passages ranging from the Law to the Prophets to the words of Jesus stress the need to help the poor if we are to please God and fulfill His will. This led to discussion about whether capitalism was a Calvinist concept and some noted that the European nations falling into recession were the Southern ones while the Northern countries where the Protestant work ethic still applied were surviving.

There was some genuine concern that while Socialism was failing all round the world, America seemed to be heading in that direction not learning any lessons from the rest of the world’s experience. All admitted that the Jim Wallis challenges about wealth and helping the poor was something Christians in America needed to address more seriously.

War and Peace

This discussion found everyone in agreement on most topics concerning a just war, the importance of national defense, the difficulties in defeating terrorism and the threat of Islamic extremism. There was some disagreement over Immigration and how to show compassion by welcoming the stranger as instructed in Scripture (Exodus 22:21) but also show concern for the nation’s own people (Deuteronomy 10:18-19). If Immigration is not done legally and becomes too widespread are we helping the stranger

but causing trouble for our own people. It was commented that the stranger must abide by the same laws as God's people in the Old Testament (Leviticus 16:29).

Concern was expressed about Islam and the seeming denial of government departments and the media to report when terrorism acts are committed by Islamic extremism. Someone noted the new word "Islamophobe" which was replacing the word "homophobe" in popular language. When a person is labeled a "phobe" they are considered intolerant, afraid, and full of irrational hate. They lose the right to be heard in popular opinion. Nobody wants to be a hater or a bigot but real dangers should be acknowledged too. One pastor felt there was a danger all Muslims would be demonized, others felt he was being naïve, and the discussion became animated!

Discussion Summary from Session 3

How should we preach? All pastors agreed that they had been challenged about their unwillingness to preach on hot button issues. Since abortion had become a political issue some confessed they did not deal with it but felt they now should especially when it arises out of the Scripture passage they are preaching from e.g. Psalm 139. Sensitivity to those sitting in the pews was discussed too but when asked if they would refrain from preaching on sexual morality if they had people living together unwed in their pews some said they didn't preach on it because they did have unwed people living together in their pews! Someone asked how much of the Bible will be left to preach if we adopt that attitude and others said we are selective anyway about the topics we choose to preach on.

However, all agreed that we should encourage our people to exercise their right to vote and not shirk their responsibility. We should also encourage them to be well informed, some denominations like the United Methodists; produce voting guides to help people understand the issues but not promoting any particular party or candidate. All also agreed that we should be more involved in local community politics. We tend to hide behind soup kitchens and food banks instead of getting into positions of influence where we might be able to make these places redundant.

Final comments included all attendees saying they had rethought some of their previous positions, all felt they should guide their people better at election times but all agreed they would not endorse a party or candidate. This was one reason why they tended to avoid the issues because if you preach against, for example, abortion you are immediately seen to be endorsing the Republican Party. However it was thought we needed to address these things for this is where our people are at. They are living in this world with all its imperfections and they need to hear God's Word applied to all situations.

Luther's idea of voting for a competent Turk rather than an incompetent Christian was discussed. Voting for a Mormon might become a real possibility in the 2012 Presidential Election. Some felt that at least a Mormon would have the same moral values as Christians as opposed to a total unbeliever. Others felt faith should not be a factor and yet others appealed to comments by George Washington that it would be impossible to rule a country without help from Almighty God. Most felt they would rather have a true Christian in the White House and in Senate and Congress. The idea of people feigning faith for election purposes was discussed. It was noted that in Britain a leader has to hide

his or her religious beliefs in order to be elected while here in the US people often are public about their faith in order to be elected. Subjects like abortion are no longer campaign issues in Europe while they still are here. The fact that this is so was perceived to be a good thing.

Because of the constraints of time the attendees were given two sermons to read at home and a questionnaire to fill out (Appendix A) and return. The sermons were from two opposing sides of the political divide and from two different types of churches, one by Greg Addison and one by Jeremiah Wright. The results of the questionnaire (Appendix B) show that the seminars did challenge the pastors to think more about their responsibility to preach before elections. Some said they would consider preaching like Greg Addison before the next election. Nobody was impressed by Jeremiah Wright's sermon but all acknowledged his type of preaching was for a different audience than all of them and was quite inspirational.

It is hoped that Christian voters in America will be better informed about Spiritual and Moral issues which are also political issues and will vote in a manner that is pleasing to the God they serve. That they elect into office people who have a Christian world view and people who will make this world a better place. Preachers have an obligation to preach all the Scriptures and tackle the difficult topics as well as the popular ones. It is true that politics will not save a person's soul nor will we ever attain a perfect world here on earth but we should do as Spurgeon said and make this world better for our being here. Also the polarizing of views and the aggressive campaigning in elections and the heated rhetoric cannot be good for society and Christians should work to be better examples of respectful discussion.

Through expository preaching all issues we have discussed will surface for they are all in God's Word and need to be interpreted and applied to the hearers for God speaks to us and guides us in all things.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Which sermon was most inspiring?
2. Do you believe these sermons would influence the hearers on how to vote?
3. Which sermon do you believe would influence its hearers most?
4. Did reading a less controversial Jeremiah Wright sermon change your opinion of him, or not?
5. (a) Does Greg Addison's sermon tell you how to vote? (b) Does Jeremiah Wright's sermon tell you how to vote?
6. Which of these pastors should lose their tax exempt status?
7. Would you ever preach like either of these men? Why? Why not?
8. As the result of attending the seminars do you believe you would address political issues in sermons more readily?

APPENDIX B

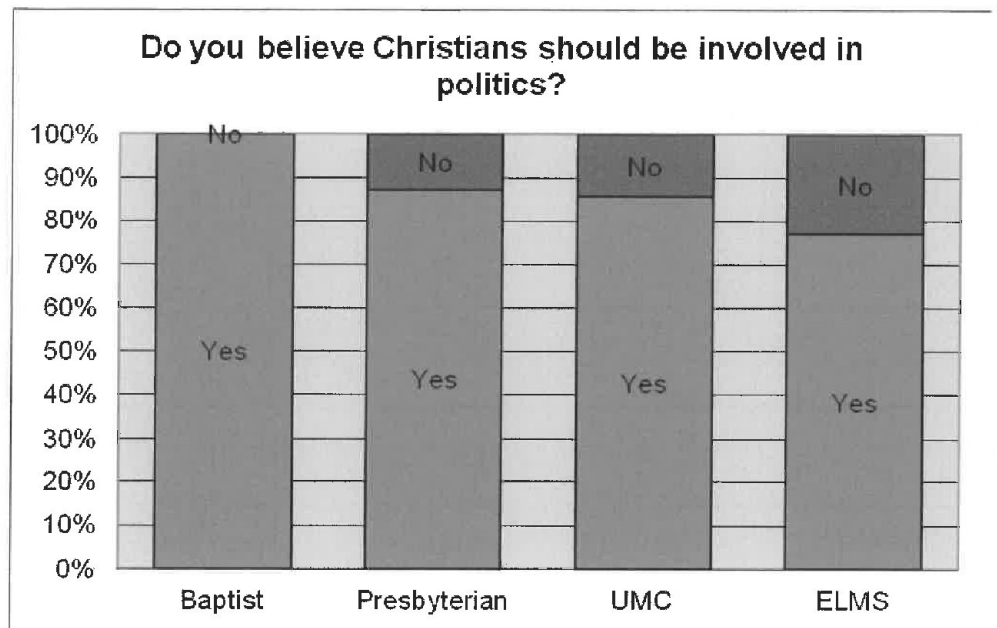
QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSE

1. All except one person said they felt inspired by the Addison sermon. That person was not inspired by either sermon.
2. They all believed these sermons would influence their hearers and in a specific way rather than in general biblical principles.
3. There was no feeling that either sermon was more influential than the other.
4. Nobody's opinion of Jeremiah Wright changed and all, including the Democratic voters, were put off by his style and things he had said. Two people acknowledged his resonance with the African American voter.
5. Most felt these sermons did not tell you how to vote but if you were to follow the sentiments of the sermons you would vote Republican as a result of Addison's sermon and Democratic as a result of Jeremiah Wright's sermon. One person questioned the latter.
6. Nobody felt either preacher should lose his tax-exempt status.
7. Only two people said they would preach like Greg Addison.
8. All said they would (or already have) addressed social and moral issues in sermons even if they are political. All felt they should encourage their congregation's to vote in

elections and to be interested and informed in what is going on in our land and local community.

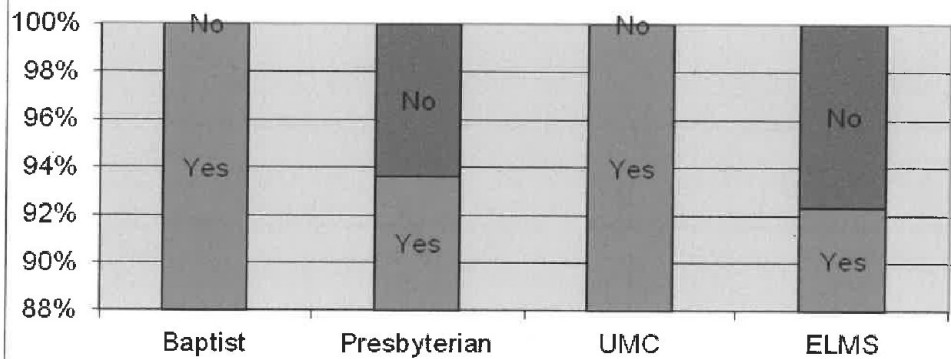
APPENDIX C

GRAPHS AND SURVEY RESULTS



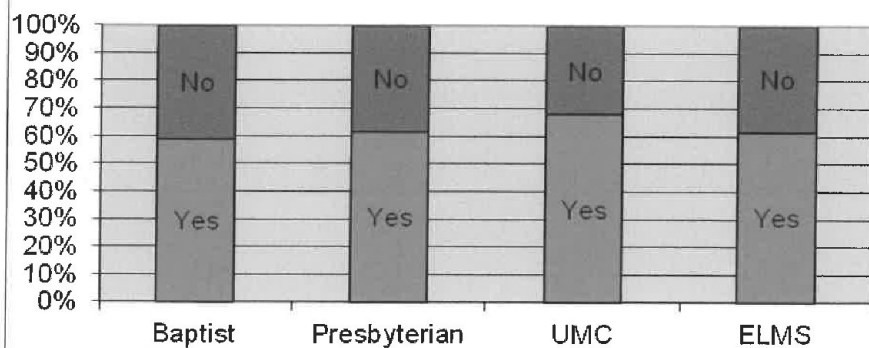
Do you believe it's important that Christians exercise their vote?

By Denomination



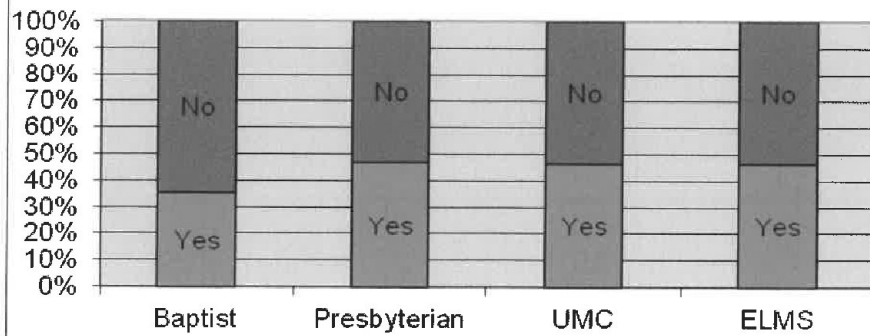
Do you think it would be helpful if Pastors preached about political issues from a biblical perspective?

By Denomination



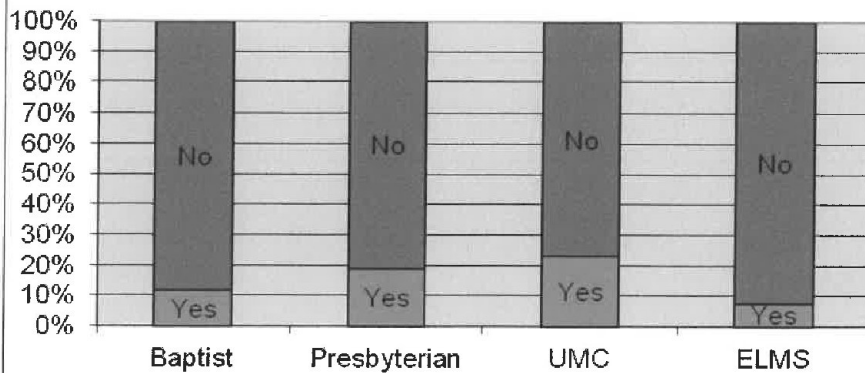
Would you welcome general guidance on how to vote from the pulpit?

By Denomination

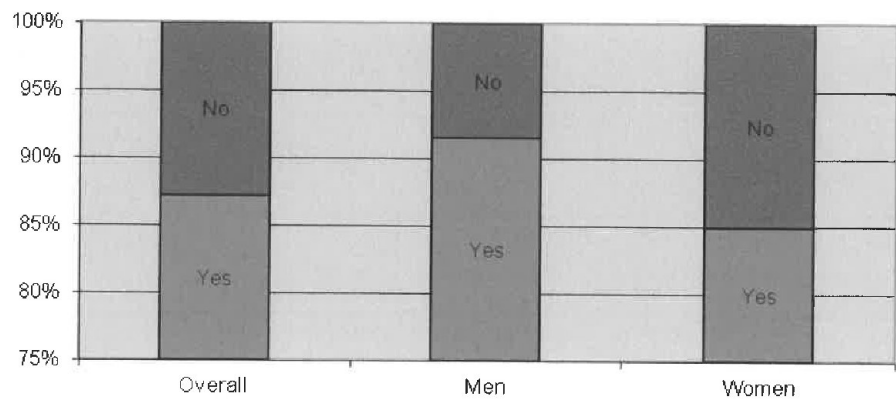


Would you welcome a sermon actually telling you how to vote from a biblical perspective?

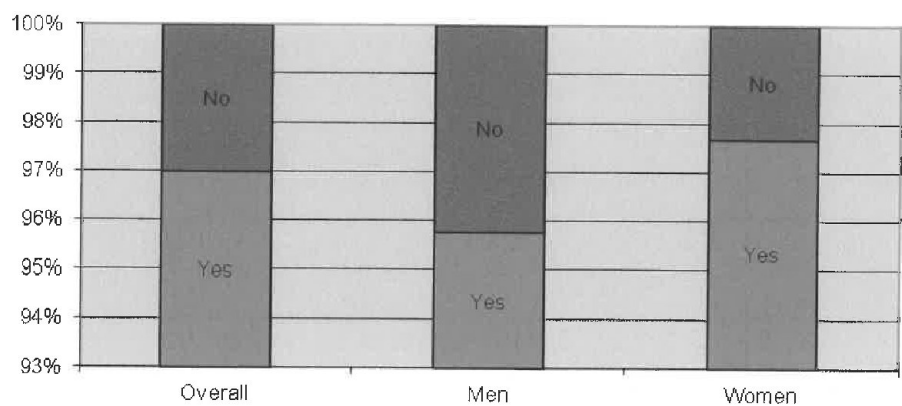
By Denomination



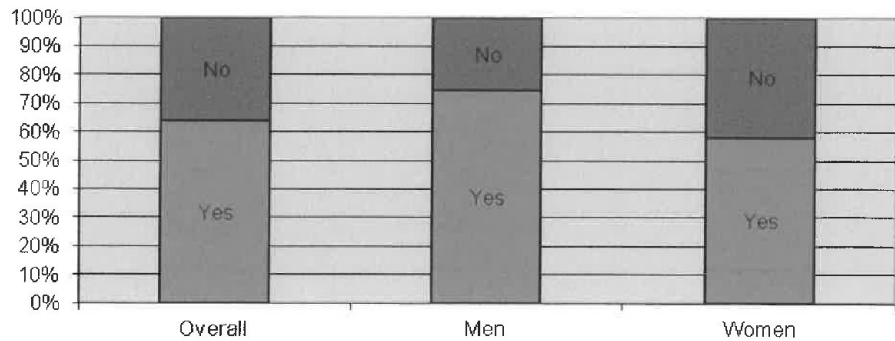
**Do you believe Christians should be involved in politics?
By Gender**



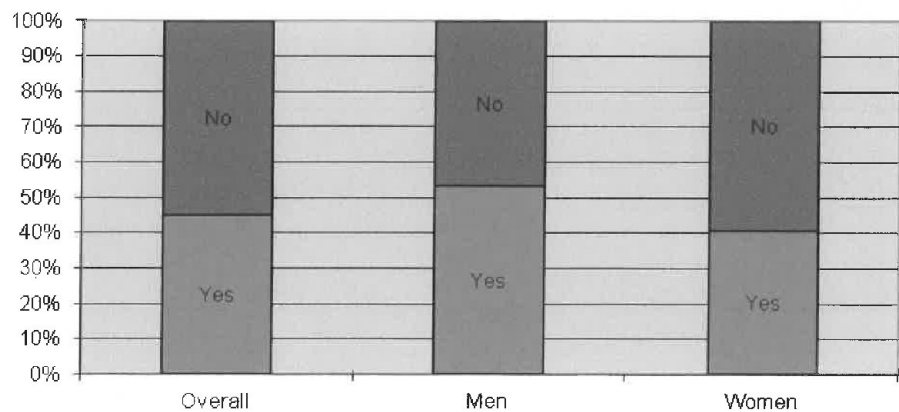
**Do you believe it's important that Christians exercise their vote?
By Gender**



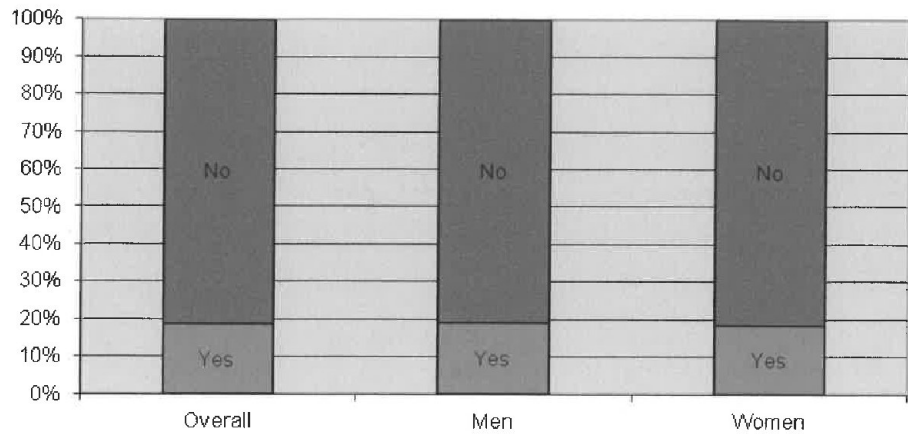
Do you think it would be helpful if Pastors preached about political issues from a biblical perspective?
By Gender



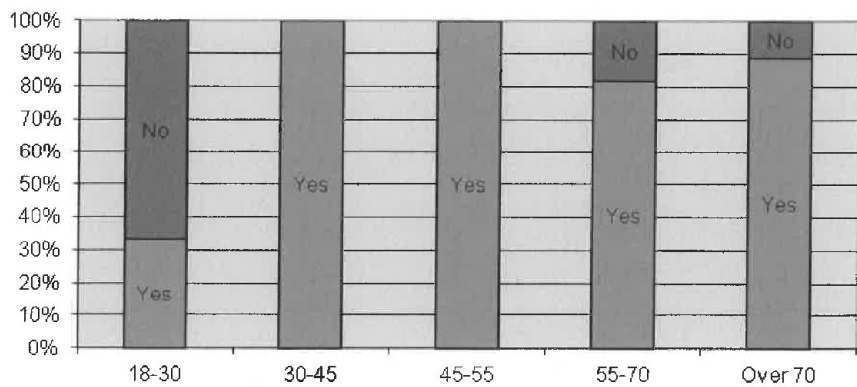
Would you welcome general guidance on how to vote from the pulpit?
By Gender



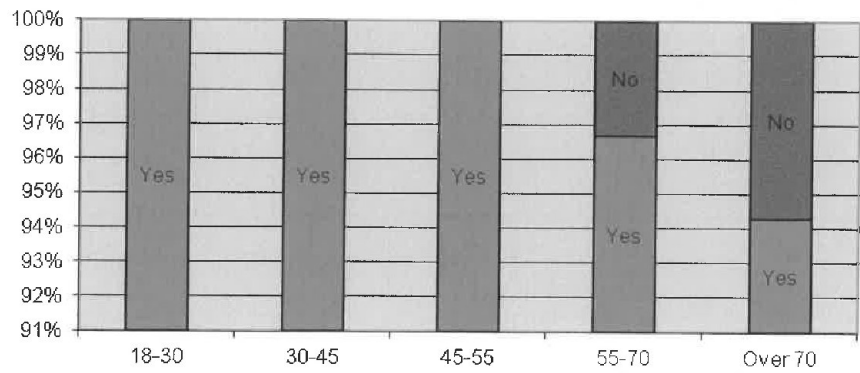
**Would you welcome a sermon actually telling you
how to vote from a biblical perspective?
by Gender**



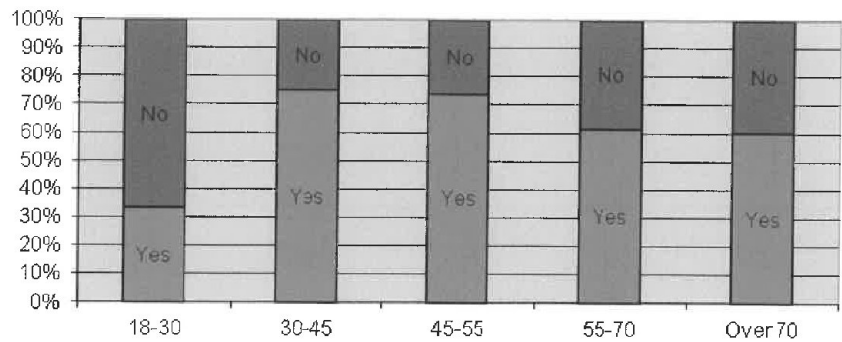
**Do you believe Christians should be involved in
politics? By Age**



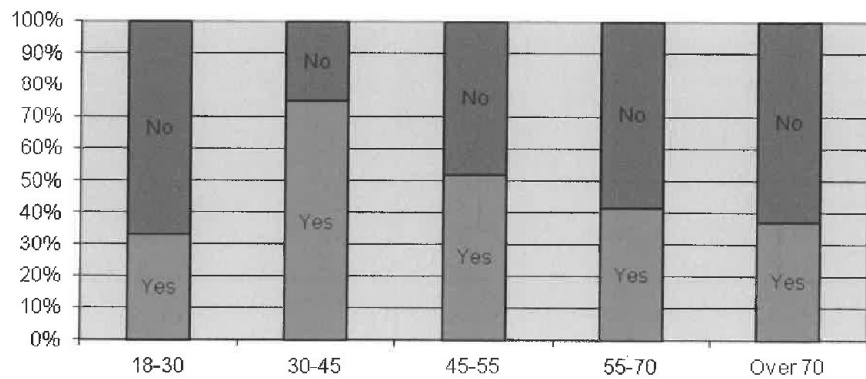
Do you believe it's important that Christians exercise their vote? By Age



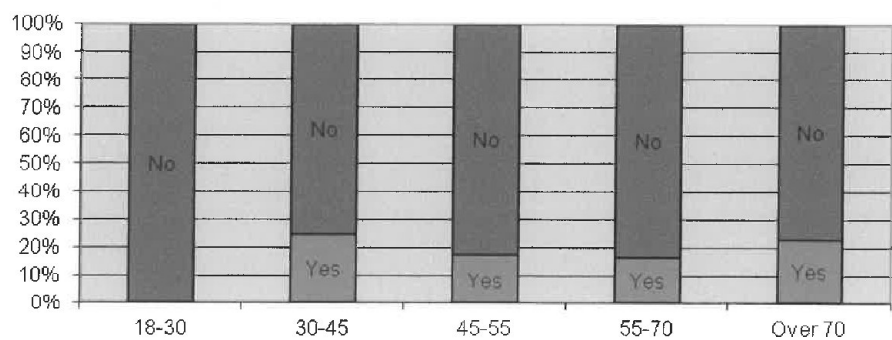
Do you think it would be helpful if Pastors preached about political issues from a biblical perspective? By Age



**Would you welcome guidance on how to vote
(general not endorsing one party or candidate)
from the pulpit?
By Age**



**Would you welcome a sermon actually telling you
how to vote (what candidate/party) from a biblical
perspective? By Age**



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